MOP FAIR

PRICE· ONE·SHILLING ·NET

Joint Scheme
DO NOT WITHDRAW

FLEETWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARIES

D. B. TIMMS, A.L.A., Borough Librarian

This book is due for return on or before the date stamped below.

102215

PENDLE FICTION RESERVE

G

Binstead, A.M.
Mop fair.

Scheme 10 SAW 15

Fines are chargeable on overdue books.
Renewals may be made by telephone or post.
Tel.
C
W
Cha

a30118 041842554b

G
X

First Edition . . . . . *March* 1905.
Reprinted . . . . . *June* 1905.

MOP FAIR

Some Elegant Extracts from the Private Correspondence of Lady Viola Drumcree, the Fatherless Daughter of Feodorovna, Countess of Chertsey

BY

ARTHUR M. BINSTEAD

Otherwise known as "PITCHER" of the Pink 'Un

SANDS & CO.

EDINBURGH: 13 BANK STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1905

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/mopfair0000arth

"'Everyone does it,' is the excuse made by all. Our public standard of morality, our code of honour, our national pride, seem to be gradually wiped out."

—THE LADY TATTON SYKES.

"The girl of the Twentieth Century, even if she smokes a cigarette and talks slang, seems to me an infinitely more capable being than her grandmother was."

—THE COUNTESS OF WARWICK.

"Many insects are in a state of maturity thirty minutes after their birth, and at seventy minutes begin to put their grandsires through their facings."

—ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS NOTE.

FIELDEN PUBLIC
LIBRARY.
FLEETWOOD
ACC. No. 102215
CLASS No. F
DATE 7/70

EPISTLES

	PAGE
FIRST	1
SECOND	21
THIRD	40
FOURTH	62
FIFTH	81
SIXTH	99
SEVENTH	114
EIGHTH	133
NINTH	149
TENTH	166
ELEVENTH	185
TWELFTH	203

MOP FAIR

EPISTLE I

EATON SQUARE, *Tuesday, June 16th.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

Yesterday was the nineteenth anniversary of my unhappy birth, and I am going to open my heart to you chiefly because it was during that white-violet epoch of innocence and virtue, the few days prior to my being bundled off to the same continental boarding-school as yourself, dear kid, that I remember some countrified wiseacre with rather less reverence than all the rest for the holy tradition beginning:

> "God bless the Squire and his relations
> And keep us in our proper stations"—

remarking that it didn't greatly matter *what* companionships a girl formed at a Swiss *pensionnat de demoiselles* since her own self-respect and her shame at the remembrance of

the fun in the dormitories would impel her to drop all such *participes criminis* with electric promptitude on her return to England — a fatuous piece of prophecy which our continued friendship flatly disproves. So, between you and me, dearest, I frankly admit that mine has been a joyless birthday by reason of my impotent yearnings after that which I have never known— paternal love; for I feel quite sure that I told you on that interesting night when at the Foire au Pain d'Epices we first tasted *créme de menthe*, I came into the world many years before the Countess of Chertsey, my mother, entered into a matrimonial alliance with Mr Cecil Contango, since when her social obligations and engagements have been so numerous and engrossing that she has never yet found time to tell me even my father's name. In my childhood I was alluded to merely as "Féo's Indiscretion," and as her photographs of that day represent her as being extremely fascinating and beautiful, it may even be that she herself got twisted in her bookkeeping. I have a vague remembrance of her coming to see me at the tiny cottage at Harrow where I vegetated with Nurse Knapper, on one Sunday afternoon when the trees were all yellow with laburnum and the bushes all lavender with lilac, and most probably the tall, military Romeo in the dark cutaway, who accompanied her, was He. For as my

mother kissed me at parting, she turned to Romeo and said, "Surely you can spare me an hour or so to-morrow to do a little shopping for her?"; at which he shuddered dreadfully and gasped out, "Me in the streets on a Monday in the daytime? Féo, you must be mad! Didn't I tell you coming down that if only Fortnum and Mason would trust me for a couple of raised pies and a case of old brandy I intended hiding in the crypt of St Paul's till the bookies had forgotten all about the City and Surburban?"

I saw Romeo once again later in the year when I was dreadfully ill—I had been many days delirious through drinking rain-water; not that all delirium is incurred in that way, but country children commonly romp until they can drink a rain-barrel dry, and—well, as Sarah says in the song, "That was the ruin of me!" When next I saw Féo (as I have been trained ever since that period to address my dam; and to-day I draw hush-money of her to call her "Sister!") it was not Romeo who brought her down, but a spruce and elderly military buck with a hot eye and a Ceylon breath, who obviously dyed his hair and probably kept at least three different vintages of purple morning mouth-wash on his dressing-table: the kind of man who involuntarily rubs his hands together and waxes eloquently conversational on entering the room in which the cloth is laid, and the red hock glasses punctuate

the cutlery at regular distances. At setting eyes on me (then six years old) he stroked my hair and, turning round, kissed Féo, which struck me as a strangely odd proceeding, not knowing, as I do to-day, that nothing more delights the elderly than to be accused of paternity.

But why should I bore you, dear, with this melting tale of "my salad days when I was green in judgment," as Cleopatra, Marc Antony's Alexandrian daisy, observes; why inflict upon you these uninteresting details of my girlhood—that flabby stage of existence in which one is principally conscious of growing out of one's underclothes? It may give you some idea of my detestation for the beings with whom I live in dependence and—then is my ink not wasted.

Yesterday was a day of storm and stress—for Féo. For once the gods on high Olympus heard my prayer and dealt "Cecil's little honey-bun" as big a bit of retributive justice as she will digest in the next six weeks. It came about in this way.

Despite her unflagging efforts to keep him strictly to quarters, Féo's polished, sin-worn, stockbroking old fragment is distinctly and extravagantly flighty. All girls of one-and-twenty look alike to him; or, as the Saturday-to-Monday hussy said of the M.C. of the seaside dancing-rooms, "he's a bit particklер, but not what you might call *nasty* particklер." From

the Regent Street barmaid with the yellow hair to the Dover Street cloak-model with the thirty-six bust "All are Welcome." And perhaps after all, the only people in the world who are truly virtuous—the few remaining savages—are only so because they do not know any better. Poor things! In any event Mr Contango is an indecisive wobbler, as his cuffs constantly covered with illegible addresses of unknown peeresses abundantly prove; and yesterday morning one of the maids of the bedchamber brought to Féo a telegram which she had found under Mr Contango's pillow. It was a hot bobsworth and had evidently been delivered to him at the club at which he dined on the previous evening. In the ardent language of omnibus-love, it began by assuring the addressee of the sender's constancy and devotion, and concluded by arranging a meeting for "seven to-morrow under the clock at Charing Cross"—plebeian Strephons being as incurably addicted to love-making "under the clock" as patrician ones are under the table.

In an aggressive state of hysteria and tears, Féo burst into my morning-room, but as the vapours are absurdly out of fashion and the woman who is on the verge of flopping is worthy only of the most pitying contempt—as, moreover, I had already laughed heartily over the telegram with the maid who found it—I manifested no emotion.

"Read this, read this!" she hissed, thrusting the pink slip into my hands. "Am I—am I to believe my eyes?"

"A telegram can be repeated," I suggested, remembering the legend on the back of the form, "at one-half the charge for transmission, any fraction of one penny less than one half-penny being reckoned as one halfpenny. At the same time the Postmaster-General will not be liable for any ——."

"Have you no pity for me, Viola?" she whined. "Mr Contango has forsaken me to go out girl-hunting."

"If so venerable a kernel, once encased in a prickly shuck—the development of a towering spike-bloom—could arouse my compassion, I should be compelled to lament the fact that I had become hopelessly dippy," I replied, "but since your mental calibre is so low that you choose to look after one man instead of being looked after by a hundred, I must not deny you my counsel and assistance."

At this she blubbered afresh and kissing me on the forehead—ugh, how I rubbed the spot with Piesse and Lubin later on!—she took my hand in hers and cried:

"And you shall find me *so* grateful, child; for instance, to-morrow you shall have that lovely chinchilla stole on which you set your heart."

"Doesn't the granny muff go with it?" I asked with apparent indifference.

"Y—yes, the muff as well," she stammered.

"Better put it down in black and white," I suggested, setting my *écritoire* before her. Bargains driven with difficulty are too often the last to be complied with. "Now then," said I, as I folded the voucher and locked it in my desk, "*quo vadis*, madame? Are you steering this craft with your heart or your head? Is the philanderer to be reclaimed in accordance with the rest of your belated theories, or is he to be gaffed and subsequently landed in the Court in which men and women are put asunder? The first is the semi-colon, the second is the climax."

"Vi, dear," she said, as I had all along foreseen she would do, "the semi-colon, please."

"That means," I interpreted, barely succeeding in suppressing my disgust, "that we include ourselves in the Charing Cross assignation. Very good, I will be ready for you at half-past six;" and I left her. Poor fool! Small wonder that every nation in the world agreed upon the point of woman's folly long, long ago; and what manner of creature is this, that, finding herself disesteemed by her mate, buys a love philtre and introduces it furtively into his evening beverage to try and bring him back? Pah! Excuse me, dearest Pat, if I abandon the subject—it overcomes me!

By half-past six Féo had cried herself hideous ; nevertheless she was dressed to go out, and, indeed, desired nothing more than to fall upon the sinner's neck and weep afresh. Possibly there are faults on both sides—as the Southend shell-fishmonger said to the bean-feasters when they complained that they couldn't keep his pickled cockles down. Possibly (again) I was wearing a more than ordinarily militant expression as I stood there, for Féo next said, with characteristic vacillancy :

"On reflection, child, I have decided to go alone. A *confrontation* of this kind is not a spectacle for your young eyes."

"And pray how are you going?" I asked, instantly perceiving the manifest advantages of being there myself, unhampered and alone.

"The landaulette is already at the door," she said. It, or some other kind of car, invariably has been ever since she took to introducing these things to her friends, and paying such of her debts as no woman, however brazen, could continue to owe with complacency, with the resultant "commissions."

"Just as I imagined!" I rejoined, with an acid sneer. "And with James and William in powder and smart liveries on the box—'Royalty-visiting-Royalty' personified—I'll be bound! A pretty way indeed to play Paul Pry—hanged if I don't think you'd go deerstalking accompanied

by Sousa's band! Oho! see, just across the burn, yon big black stag feeding low down with five-and-twenty hinds: will you kindly have the goodness to strike up *The Washington Post-office!* Really, Féo, you are almost too absurd for human toleration. No; you will go to the Embankment on the Underground, and, turning up Villiers Street, will mount the wooden stairs and enter Charing Cross station by the side door. Six paces diagonally to the left will give you a position from which you will command an unobstructed view of the entire platform-approach from behind Smith's bookstall: you will thus face the clock as well as every door by which the guilty pair can enter. So now, good-bye. I am, by the way, fiscally crippled till the end of the month; what sugar have you?"

Helping myself to a few sovereigns from her proffered purse, I dutifully kissed her hand and followed her to the hall doors, waiting there—to the no small wonderment of the footmen—until I saw her turn the corner into Belgrave Place, when I promptly slipped out also.

Being fortunate enough to pick out a really good hansom, I was probably the first from *our* stable to reach the battle-ground, and, ensconcing myself behind an abutting corner of the Continental Parcels Office, I endeavoured to decide in my own mind which of the many casual Eves present was the other runner. My ultimate fancy

rested between two. The first of these was a tall blonde, in a heel-tipping skirt and mess-jacket of blue herring-bone, with torquoise velvet cuffs and *empièçements* and gilt studs. The cab-man who set her down and received a bare shilling for his fare, asked her—very kindly, I thought—if she really felt she could spare it, at which she told him she would gladly have made it more, but she had only a penny left, and might need that herself. The second was a decided brunette in a daring blending of pink chiffon and pale yellow silk, worn with a mauve Tam-o'-Shanter with a gold quill, and patent-leather boots with white cloth tops. Omitting the white cloth tops, she was the living ideal of the persecuted heroine of *Under the Red Macintosh, or the Toque-Builder's Typewriter*, which, of course, you remember quite well. I often take it up, for there has always seemed to me to be such a genuine touch of human nature about "Gwendoleyn's" landlady who was partial to a little drop of gin, and used to drink it out of a footless egg-cup which she carried in her reticule whilst tramping the streets with "Gwendoleyn" in search of an honourable theatrical engagement, such as a lady could accept.

It was at two minutes past seven, or there-abouts, that Mr Contango appeared. He passed by the blonde in the blue herring-bone with the wig-wag walk unnoticed, nor did he pay the

least attention to "Gwendoleyn" in the pink and yellow: you may well imagine my surprise! As he approached the bookstall—and there were so many people about that my eyes followed him only with great difficulty — blundering madly towards the spot where the warmest panther in the Peerage lay crouching for a spring, there burst from the swing doors of the Ladies' Cloak Room a tall, fair girl in grey, her nostrils dilated, and her Rembrandt-red hair crowned by a black beaver Toreador, with a pink vulture's pom-pom introduced jauntily on the left side! She saw Mr Contango, as she thought, departing, and ran towards him; but while there still remained a good ten feet of platform—and thrice ten solid strangers hurrying across it—between herself and her lover, she suddenly arrested her progress as the infuriated Féo dashed from her ambush, and, with a small but firm gloved hand, gripped her lawful incubus by the right coat-sleeve!

"Pray, Mr Contango, what brings you here at this unusual hour?"

The coward quailed beneath her infuriated glare, and struggled as fiercely as he dared without incurring public resentment, to wrench his imprisoned arm free. Féo, however, clung like a barnacle to a ship's keel. But she couldn't give the weight away. His superior avoirdupois enabled Mr Contango to tug her steadily through the unsympathetic crowd, and, wilfully and

deliberately—though Féo, poor fool! did not realise it — into the route or pathway down which a grimy railway-porter was pushing an iron-wheeled trolley, burdened with two-score of sooty and malodorous carriage-lamps.

"My leave, please, my leave; mind 'er grease!" growled the fellow, shoving the corners of the truck into the just and unjust alike.

A strange light shone in Mr Contango's eyes: it was a beam of inspiration. As the cumbrous hand-waggon with its glittering but grimy cargo passed by him, he very adroitly wiped his right palm along the oil-blacked tops of the lower tier of smoking lamps; then closed that hand and kept it for a moment behind him. Féo, meanwhile, finding the pulling growing gradually more feeble, fatuously imagined that the fish was spent, and getting out the conversational gaff to despatch it, reiterated:

"Mr Contango, I demand to know where you were going?"

"Certainly, dearest. Straight into the lavatory. Just look at this, as Serpolette says ——" and he stuck out the paw that literally reeked with oily blackness.

"Been shaking hands with one of your city friends, I presume?" sneered Féo, stepping back to avoid contact with the paw, for, to do her justice, Féo is always so daintily, unimpeachably

turned out that even the flies wipe their feet before alighting on her.

"Alas!" replied Mr Contango in a melodramatic way, espying an exit from his dilemma, "there is one friend at least whose honest hand I ne'er may grasp again—(here he improved his market by covering his eyes with his hand, thereby transferring much soot to his face)—I fly to his bedside now—now, er—by way of the lavatory. Do not further detain me, dear heart."

"I release you that you may perform your much-needed ablutions," stipulated Féo, loosening her grip, "but I still await you, and your explanation, here. Go, and return quickly;' and Mr Contango slunk away as meanly as did Theseus when he gave poor Ariadne the slip on the "front" at Naxos.

Down the stone steps went Mr Contango, and into the palatial marble dungeon on whose atmosphere the all-pervading odour of scented-soap has a firm half-Nelson, and whose echoing walls magnify the hiss of the half-minute rushes of water into the roars of Niagaraic torrents. At least that is how such an apartment was once described in the report of an inquest upon a defaulting attendant who had committed suicide on being told after the quarterly stocktaking that he was two-hundred-and-fifty-four wash-up's, ten roller towels, and eight gold fish short.

As he descended the stairs, Mr Contango's concernment was less for his lawful than for his unlawful partner, but his lucidity returned on the instant of his setting eyes on a middle-aged postman who was dallying at the wash-basins, the traditional fidelity of the postman being readily apparent to anyone who has looked over some of the continental postcards which he, in spite of all temptations, has faithfully surrendered to the addressees. Therefore Mr Contango went up at once to the postman and said:

"I have two little commissions for you to execute; they will not occupy you more than five minutes, and the pay is one shilling a minute. First of all, go to the booking-office and purchase me a first-single to some station a little way down the line; no matter where. Take this half-sovereign and bring me the change."

So the postman went. He was an unconscionable time gone, the delay mainly arising out of his ingenuous consideration for his employer's pocket. With praiseworthy economy he selected "Spa Road, Bermondsey," at the ticket-window, and, as first-singles to that fashionable promenade are seldom or never asked for at Charing Cross, the booking-clerk had to fake one with a typewriter. The joy of the simple letter-carrier at having nine-and-sixpence to return in change was so real, however, that Mr Contango checked his

angry impatience, and hurriedly proceeded to instruct the postman in his second errand.

"Upstairs, just over by the big slate on which they chalk up the Channel weather report and the number of baggages on the Folkestone boat," he said, "you will see a young lady—tall and fair, with lavishly large brown eyes; wearing a grey frock, and a black hat with a pink feather in it. Hand her this card, and——ah, yes, here are the five shillings I promised you;" and he placed in the postman's hand the silver and one of his visiting cards, inscribed:—

> "*Fly. Pray pardon this seeming but unintentional despotism, Queen of the Human Race, but* PLEASE *fly: we are observed. Will pick you up later on. You and you only, the entire time for* CECIL."

From half-way up the lavatory steps, with his keen eyes on a level with the platform, Mr Contango watched the postman single out the tall girl in grey, and deliver his message. He saw her smile sadly—tall women have not the vital force of little women—as she turned to leave the station by the arched exit through

which the cabs pass, and, sticking the railway ticket conspicuously in his hatband (an unusual proceeding, but a desirable one in the circumstances), he sallied forth to rejoin his wife with as brave a show of unconcern as ever a man returning to a life of irksome chastity carried.

"And now, dear Féo," he said blandly, as he rejoined the surmising simpleton who was fully prepared to submit to a mild remonstrance on the more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger, or deplorable-pity-of-a-man-marrying-a-woman-who-never-seems-to-understand-him lines, as the price of her victory, "is your stirring little farce at an end, and am I to be permitted to smooth the pillow of my poor friend who lies at the point of death at—at, er—Tunbridge Wells?"

"Tunbridge Wells!" she echoed, half acquiescing only for the reason that her brain was reeling at her utter inability to reconcile the proposition to the telegram still in her pocket; "I presume that, without an atom of luggage, you would return to-night?"

Strolling aimlessly across the station as they talked, they had by this time reached the open door of the glaring refreshment-bar, and as Mr Contango raised his eyes he caught an instantaneous reflection in the oblong mirror, just ahead, of a group of three persons of which he and his wife were but two.

The third was the faithful postman!

Straight up came the blundering idiot and roared as if into a megaphone:

"I give the laidy the note as you wrote downstairs, sir, an' she said All-right; she'll go straight up to Verrey's an' wait in the restarong till you join her!"

. . . . . .

Féo and Mr Contango returned to Eaton Square in eloquent silence and a four-wheeler, and ascended at once to their respective rooms to sulk, Féo first going to the very nadir of narrow-minded littleness by locking the street door and taking the key upstairs with her—which proceeding on the part of a countess so shocked Andrews, our head butler, that he handed Féo his portfolio when he passed the matutinal mocha and the vesper rashers this morning. How it will all end I little know and care considerably less. Quite possibly Féo will once again act the upper and the nether millstone by the essentially materialistic man who seems not to worry about little inconsistencies so long as he leads the life dictated by the senses: probably he will tardily give her his word of honour to leave undone the things which he finds himself unable to do; also to be seen at church between drinks on a Sunday. The only certainty about these squabbles is that, whenever this excessive hammering in of the old, well-settled nail is going on, the burden of supporting existence in the company of the two

most morose and splenetic mortals in London falls upon *me*. How truly has Ben Jonson said, "Apes are apes, though clothed in scarlet!"

Have you heard, by the way, what a fearfully narrow squeak dear Lady Invernairne had the other day? Her marriage to the middle-aged Earl was, of course, a terrible error—though not in the sense intended by the Parisian restaurateur whose consort's arithmetic as practised on the customers' bills was so distinctly "against the consumer" that Monsieur once assured one of his intimates, "Jules, mon vieux, I would not take fifty thousand francs for the errors committed by madame, my wife, this season alone!" No, dear, it was a mistaken business in the sense that while she was—and still is—positively irresistible to any right-thinking bachelor in any part of Christendom, he soon returned to his old life of club, and race-meeting, and card table. Naturally she has had to console herself, and—well, the other day she was sitting at her tiny writing table, penning a note that commenced with "My very naughty, but delightful darling," and concluded with "Yours and yours alone, I swear," when she became suddenly aware that the Earl had entered the room and was standing immediately behind her, looking over her shoulder, and doubtless reading sentences which were warm enough to have caused growing wild flowers to droop their heads and wither. Without an instant's hesitation she

dipped her pen deep into the ink pot, signed the letter in a bold hand "Jane Huggins," and arose with the remark:

"There, that's done! But who in the wide world could have foreseen the domestic servant problem reaching the point of compelling a Countess to write her illiterate, but in all other senses desirable, parlour-maid's love-letters?

From the Far East there returned yesterday, torn and seared, Lieutenant Percy Brancaster, who a year or so ago was betrothed to the Honourable Mrs Attie Alderney, the young Meredithian widow of his once dearest chum—at least they were at Harrow together, and Attie never set eyes on Percy without soundly punching his head, even if he had to run a hundred yards to do it. Percy, as you doubtless are aware, was deeply in love with Phyllis Postance long before Attie Alderney came along and took her, after which, poor thing! he was like the solitary prisoner who had nothing to do and nowhere to go when they took him out of the Bastille and destroyed it. Having left the Navy through a breach of regulation number two-million-eight-hundred-and-ninety-seven, concerning the method of parting the eyebrows across the top of the nose, he became imbued with a somewhat Quixotic and reasonless desire to go and fight on behalf of the little yellow Japs, but had no sooner arrived in the Ping Yang Inlet on

the Ta-Tong River than a Russian torpedo-boat handed him the distressing injury which, I am told, disqualifies him for any active service save the compilation of some such work of personal observation as "With Neither Side in the Late War." So luckless a person, prematurely aged, his cheeks hollowed by long suffering, his once golden-brown hair all etiolated and falling, compels one's sympathy, yet one cannot quite blame Phyllis for absolutely declining to receive, let alone resume courtship, with one who as a husband would be completely incapable of ever making up any little domestic disagreement which would be sure to arise from time to time. For when the torpedo exploded, so Phyllis tells me (and she is an advanced student of Phrenology), it carried poor Mr Brancaster's bump of forgiveness entirely away! And yet we are continually being told that the "horrors of war" are much overstated!

But my hand grows cramped, so, dearest, adios.

Your affectionate friend,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE II

EATON SQUARE, *Thursday, July 2nd.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

For three very good reasons, each in itself sufficient, I am about to tell you a profound secret. Firstly, I feel quite sure that absolute secrecy is completely impossible from you; comparative secrecy where you are concerned, dear, is only a matter of degree; so that in a week at most my news will be all over London; Secondly, I well know how hopelessly remote my matrimonial prospects have seemed to you, because everyone has told me how sympathetically you have stated your views on the subject; Thirdly, I feel it my duty as an old schoolfellow to rekindle the spark of expectancy in your own bosom by imparting the news that there is now one girl the less to oppose you in the marriage market—and though, dear, I would far rather see you develop into a sour and parchment-skinned old maid than frighten you into

making a hasty and perhaps unhappy alliance, every competitor to disappear from the betting should inspire new life in the poor crocks still unprofitably swelling the handicap, and especially those whose roses are beginning to look faded, and who are, broadly speaking, becoming manifestly frayed and shop-worn. Men, who are largely optimists, tell us that marriage will never lose its popularity, because if there were no marriages there would be no married women, and if there were no married women, who would there be for the men to make love to? But we—I should of course, say *you*—know differently. Fish will not rise at bait that has been on the hook time after time, and girls lose their bloom by being slobbered and mauled by many triflers. In her translation of the dressing-room-guide of the Baroness Staffe, Lady Colin Campbell flatly stated that much kissing was extremely bad for the complexion, so though as you say—with monotonous frequency, by the way—"we weren't doing a thing but having a good time," it really was your trifler of the moment who (according to his low-flash lights, poor booby!) was having the "good time" and you who were "not doing a thing," I can feel for you. At the bottom of that lane lies the Discard, dear Patricia.

It was on the box seat of a regimental coach at Ascot, while Botfly was delaying the start for the Wokingham Stakes, that I accepted a pro-

posal of marriage from Lord Evelyn Godolphin Mountprospect, youngest son of the Earl of Atholbrose. Being of our house party at Mrs Mortimer-Toddpush's, at Wargrave, he had been addressing me in rather wild superlatives all the week, but it was not until we sat side by side upon the coach, and every head but his and mine was turned towards where the delightful Botfly was playing the goat, that Evelyn permitted his right arm to reconnoitre. And Evelyn—my Evelyn—is as *svelte* and refined as his name suggests; personally, I have no desire to be pursued and hugged by a hairy monster, and Plato tells us how the early athlete goes to pieces. Imagine the loathsome lot, Patricia, of the unhappy girl united in holy matrimony with an athlete who has unexpectedly gone to pieces! Owing to the exercise of influence in high quarters, Mrs Mortimer-Toddpush says, Evelyn's military duties are considerably lightened, and consist chiefly of writing the prologues and epilogues to the plays presented by the dramatic club and showing the general's lady guests where to wash their hands. Contrast my Ascot, spent under these halcyon conditions, with my only previous experience of a racecourse; when I was driven down to Sandown Park by Mr Contango, who, being heavily in debt to the Ring, had to get under the dogcart whenever a bookmaker looked across the course!

Speaking of this terrible person moves me to relate to you an adventure into which he precipitated Féo, poor wretch! only a week ago. Mr Contango's City affairs were, I may tell you, in a very parlous state, and what he vulgarly terms the "Carnegie-library-compound" was very scarce. He had applied frequently to Féo for one hundred pounds to keep his tailor quiet, but as Féo had some months previously entrusted him with a similar amount to pay a dressmaker's bill, and he had dishonestly expended it in taking a ballet girl to Brighton—a positively dreadful creature who, biting the wrong end of the asparagus at the table d'hôte (so Noser's Detectives ascertained) cried to the waiter, "Hoy, cully, these muddy bluebells aint half done!"—she very naturally declined. Moreover, her health has of late been so indifferent as to have soured her temper, and her physician despotically said that if she did not go at once to a more genial climate, she would before long be investigating the surprises of a future state.

Last Thursday, therefore, she and Mr Contango, followed by the luggage brake piled high, set out for the Riviera, their destination being Hyères, the sheltered little city which nestles beneath the friendly Maurettes. The train by which they proposed to travel was the eleven o'clock first-class boat express from Victoria, but scarcely had they entered that station and

alighted from their brougham than the unexpected —by Féo, anyway—happened.

Out from the refreshment buffet rushed two big men who pounced upon Mr Contango and grabbed him by each arm. One of them said something about "handcuffs," but the other ruled it out as being unnecessary; in less than twenty minutes they would be at Brixton, he said, meanwhile if the prisoner resisted they could put him on the floor of the cab and sit on him. As Mr Contango did naught but roll his eyes in misery and groan quite audibly, Féo had to interplead.

"What—what do you want of my husband?" she demanded.

The elder of the two men took a blue document from his breast pocket and replied:

"Two hundred an' forty-one pound thirteen an' fourpence."

"And what for pray?" inquired Féo.

"Judment an' costs, Copthall *versus* Contango—Stock Exchange differences," answered the bailiff with an air almost of personal resentment.

For a moment or so Féo gazed with scornful disgust at the wretch who stood cowering between his captors.

"You shambling, sheep-faced exile from Hell!" she cried, "how much more are you going to cost me? Fade, fade, ye roses! Is it for this that——"

But the men cut her brutally short by saying it was high time they were moving, as they had got to fetch "another one" from Kennington before dinner; consequently Féo realised that it was up to her to get busy with her little oblong grey-green cheque-book or let her consort go—Inside! Like the fool that she is, she couldn't bear to see him buckled—indeed even as she gazed at him she was secretly longing to throw her arms around him. All intense natures quarrel with those they adore.

"Where can I write a cheque?" she asked of the man with the warrant.

"Come into the bar, lady," replied the bailiff, and led the way.

"To whom shall I make it payable?"

"Flight and Dobell, ma'am, Serjeants-at-Mace to the Sheriffs of London, at your service. But it must be an open cheque to 'bearer,' please, and my mate will remain with the gentleman while I fetch the cash."

Féo certainly squirmed a little at the prospect of remaining in the company of the bailiff and his prisoner while the tipstaff went to Coutts's and returned, but there was no help for it; Mr Contango's iron devotion to backsliding would assuredly land him in some fresh muddle if he were left alone; meanwhile the eleven o'clock train had passed on its way, and there was no other until nine that night.

"Please take a cab both ways," said Féo, as she handed her cheque and a small gold coin to the officer, "and bid the driver not to spare his cattle."

Never did ten minutes go so slowly; with the conventional splitting-headache demanded by the occasion, Féo endeavoured to still her nerves with tea in the buffet, but to no purpose. Eventually the man came back, grinning his satisfaction.

"Is this wretched business ended now, pray?"

"Quite, ma'am; everythink's all-Sir-Garnet," replied the bailiff, "of course it's not perticklarly pleasant, but we've only done our duty and I hope, ma'am—and you too, sir—will admit as we've not exceeded it. Should you do so, sir, this is our firm's address—pardon the envelope but I haven't got a card about me. Good day, ma'am, and good day to you, sir:" and they departed.

Poor fool—if only she had known! For the dirty grubby envelope which Mr Contango instantly thrust into his pocket contained fresh clean bank notes to the value of eighty pounds—Contango's "corner," or third share, in the most disgraceful conspiracy ever conceived to victimise a wealthy wife. Mr Contango had planned the whole thing. The imaginary "bailiff" who spoke about the handcuffs is well known in the neigh-

bourhood of the Haymarket as Posh Peters, "the Panton Street Plunger," while the counterfeit "tipstaff" who smashed the cheque is a dog-fighting publican who runs a pothouse for sports called "The Shepherd and Flock" in Golden Square—our retained detective pointed him out to me on the course at Ascot; he was dressed in a yellow suit with scarlet stripes, with a leather satchel at his waist, and a mauve opera-hat on his head; he was standing on an upturned wine-box and bellowing, "This an' the next! The old firm! This an' the next!"

Yet Féo has forgiven all. A blubbered promise to sin no more, and a written first-charge on the stock of a brace of Kentish coal-mines as innocent of the possession of a scrap of inflammable fossil as a pickled onion, have more than made peace, and Féo and her Cecil are slowly stewing in the balsamic sunshine in the tropical gardens of the Hotel des Palmiers at Hyères.

By this mention of "the proscenium of the Riviera" I am reminded, by the way, that, walking down Bond Street the other afternoon, I encountered Gertrude Viney, now a confirmed invalid through sheer worry. In good health, however, she was always a trifle too florid, so that she really looks awfully well when in fact she is dreadfully ill. As I daresay you remember, dear, she went, about eighteen months ago, to stay with a married sister during a certain

interesting period, and became so hopelessly involved with her own brother-in-law that the young mamma on her first day out, drove straight to her solicitor and had a petition put on the file. The decree nisi which resulted was made absolute only in April, the erring Gordon Peter and Gertrude being united the self-same afternoon. But now come the complications. Muriel proves to be in a rapid decline and as her death alone would bring the happy pair within the operative scope of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill—this on the word of folks, male and female, married and single, "wives, widows, or whatnots," as the Woman's Suffrage orator put it—they are nursing her assiduously, and are about to give a bill-of-sale on their guilty home in order to raise sufficient funds to give the wronged woman the full course of the celebrated curds-and-whey cure at Hyères. Experiencing the divine afflatus at times, poor Gertrude has put her life's romance into a poem, an autographed copy of which she gave me, and which I would, in turn, put before the whole world were it not for the fact that it seems rank sacrilege to place such pretty penmanship in the soiled hands of the practical printer. You may form an opinion of its beautiful sentiment, however, from the opening lines:

"As Gordon dried my tears which flowed with unabated force,
Up in the lift our lawyer rode to hand us our divorce."

Most earnestly do I hope that no black and untoward event may mar their happiness, since it really is a most desirable alliance for Gertrude, Gordon Peter coming of a fearfully old and original Scottish family—so old, in fact, that it was his direct ancestor who died of shellfish-poisoning through eating the identical mussel that Musselburgh was named after. But before I write another line I must turn aside to tell you of the despicable way in which Lord Invernairne rang the bell on poor Lavinia over the trifling "Jane Huggins" deception of which I made mention in my last.

The elderly rake, most of whose amours are even less pretentious than were those of Zeus himself, has long been suspected by Lavinia of pursuing the beautiful in the shape of a certain hourglass-figured Maddox Street frock-hitcher—(the earlier vulgate had it "little milliner," which, through gradations of "showroom sideshrine," "Busy Lizzie the teagown model," and "Miss Never-never of the night rails," has subsided to "frock-hitcher"; though, bless your heart, what's in a name, as the little Kaffir boy observed when he explained to the missionary that he was called "Two for Tuppence" partly because he was a twin, and partly because his father was, from his mother's account, by no means a rich man)—who took less concern about the salvation of her soul than that her height remained at sixty-eight and

her waist measurement at twenty inches. Well, the other morning, Lavinia had heard the postman's knock, and had just caught sight of Invernairne returning to a mauve envelope a letter which he had hurriedly perused. As Lavinia swept into the room the *billet*, with its angular feminine superscription, fell upon the tablecloth, and she asked imperatively, "Pray, who is your solitary correspondent this morning?" "Why, one of those confounded scoundrels that Labouchere is always showing up!" cried the old sinner, never batting an eyelash, never petering an inch, though the angry missive, which still lay on the white damask, was from the little "side-shrine of the showroom," to say that she was so unutterably sick of her indefinite position, that unless she received a "pony" in cash (with which to go away for a few days and forget her identity) by lunch time, she was going to put on her red hat and blue bird's-eye skirt, and come straight round to interview his "squaw," tear down his tepee, and "then set fire to the prairie."

"A dod-gasted betting circular from Brussels, my darling, an alleged state-aided raffle for a carriage and pair," he continued. "It is perfectly monstrous that such stuff is allowed to pass through the G.P.O.!" Men are never too crafty to rule by pretending to submit, well knowing that a suspicious woman who has lost her temper is the prize bunk of the universe; but it was

gratuitously mean of him to kick her as she lay in a frenzy of screaming and laughing on the hearthrug, notwithstanding the pretty general agreement amongst medical men that when a person is hysterical certain portions of the body have absolutely no feeling.

Evelyn has just written to ask if he may take me on Wednesday next to the annual show of the National Sweet Pea Society, but I am far more desirous of going to the Music Hall Sports, if only I can decide how best to convey to him the fact that I am aware not only of their existence but of their proximity. And I here place it on record that my vassalage to the music hall cause dates from my perusal of the latest novelette of the enthralling "Peas-in-the-Pot Series"—*'Tween the Met and the Mogul, or Who Shared her Brougham?*—for though I can pretend neither to endorse or refute the opening chapter, in which the soulless Waterloo Road Agent, utterly unscrupulous when in search of fresh "talent," appears at the village picnic and doctors the claret cup, whereby he not only ensnares all the more beautiful of the village maidens, and precipitates an unseemly squabble between two bishops, who doff their aprons and invite each other to "settle it ahtside," but by the same mean subterfuge causes a rural dean to compromise an aged lady district visitor in a shrubbery, and a cub-curate to openly relate the

story of the chimney-sweep at Epsom; the main story is obviously inspired. Again is the keen observation of the author apparent to his readers in the chapter in which the heroine, on her death-bed, her frail life ebbing slowly away, has sent for the girl who had been in the same row in the chorus with her, with an imploring request to see her ere her spirit wings its way to the skies, and the friend, having nerved herself for the trying interview, stands weeping by the melancholy bedside and asks if there is any last service she can render. "There is, there is," cries the dying girl, as a gleam lights up her poor wan features. "In the top drawer of my dressing-table you will find about a bushel and a half of somewhat sporty photographs which I shouldn't like my Charlie to get hold of when I, alas! am no more!" And then the poor head falls back, and an unutterable calm comes over the scene, broken only by the sobs of the *confidante* as she searches among the medicine bottles to see if there isn't a solitary, but comforting, drain of gin left; it is an intensely engaging book.

With these themes taking the place of the very breath in my nostrils, I slipped out after dinner the other night disguised in an old race-course coat of Féo's, and a three-cornered French feather toque, and went for the first time in my life alone to a music hall. Had Féo been at home she would probably, with the proverbial

fickleness of *mères* in July, have tolled the bell on the whole proceeding; but I fortunately picked up in the promenade of the hall quite a nice girl, who, like myself, had given her chaperon the slip. She was dressed in a skin-tight scarlet cutaway, with a double row of half-sovs, saved by herself out of her cigarette allowance from her trustee, she said; white camel-hair felt hat with emerald osprey plume, and skirt of dove-coloured zibeline with strappings and applique of satin in the same soft tint. Although she insisted on my calling her "Hilda," I could find it in my heart only to give her my name as "Jane," a piece of churlishness for which I readily made atonement to my conscience by advancing "Hilda" the two sovereigns without which, she said, her "beast of a landlady" was going to give her in charge for pawning her sheets!

Though I discerned the wild generosity which led "Hilda" to assume this recklessness in order to put me at my ease, I really laughed so vulgarly at her irresistible drolleries that I shook one of my garters loose, and in a desperate dive for the silver buckle and a despairingly vicious tug at the pink silk, I drew the wretched thing so tight that I temporarily suspended the circulation of the blood, and put my limb in such a state of numb paralysis that I talked what the Teutons call "gab fest," and ultimately fled in confusion. Like the Virginienne in Vitechapelle, "whose

beauty and whose black blood alike invited insult," any sort of exit was the way out for me; though it seemed good, when I reached home, to lie awake and go over it all again. And I especially remembered that "Hilda" solicited me to be sure to go to the Music Hall Sports; also that when, thinking of dear Evelyn, I asked if I should bring a gentleman, she replied enthusiastically, "Ray-ther! or his blooming scalp!" Moreover, she gave me the appended programme of the various events, adding that she herself would have been a pretty hot pigeon for the third race, but that her "boy" was a bit of a blossom in some matters, and didn't wish it:—

AUTHORISED PROGRAMME OF EVENTS. ONE PENNY.

1.0 p.m. ONE MILE HARE AND HOUNDS RACE.—Proprietors pursued by Disengaged Artistes. Hares (proprietors) to receive 120 yards start, and each Hound pulling down a Hare to receive a fortnight's engagement at his, or her, highest West End salary. 11,473 subs., all Hounds. Three Hares to enter, or no race.

1.30 p.m. COMIC EXIT COMPETITION (to be won three years in succession). The Cup, a valuable piece of Royal Porcelain with two handles, suitable for any Leading Lady's dressing-room, is at present held by *Mr Alec Blinkers*, who, in his highly successful sketch entitled "Penny-a-Saucer, Pick-where-you-like," catches an imaginary white cabbage-moth, flying above a pot of musk on the back cloth, swallows it, falls over a

coffee-stall, and goes into the wings with a head-spin. There are five entries, as follows :

Ben Brill, who does the side-splitting wrassle with the dummy policeman in "The Rozzers Club Raid" ;

Harry Tee, whose "Melodious Ironfoundry," in which he so feelingly renders "The Blind Boy," on an engine bedplate weighing 20 cwt., heads the hanger at Wigan next week ;

W. Higgs, who carries on the trunk in the first act of "The Horse Doctor" ;

Fred Hipoleon, hind legs of the Blondin Hippopotamus ; and

The Luggage Man at Oldham (entered by wire).

2.0 p.m. THROWING THE CHAIRMAN'S HAMMER.—This long-popular event has had to be abandoned, owing to the decadence of these once flourishing officials, the last one of which has, we regret to say, just gone off his dip in St Giles's Workhouse from a surfeit of gin-and-water ; but a prize for lady serios has been substituted, entitled :

SLINGING THE BLUE WHEEZE.—First Prize, A Gallon of Sunburn Lotion, donated by the Southend Chemist that sees to the Sons of the Phœnix ; Second Prize, a Nansen Ice Pick and a Sealskin Mandoline, sent by King Oscar of Sweden ; Third Prize, a Japanese Pot Fern and a Dish of Hops, by the landlord of "The Three Thugs," Lambeth Walk.

2.30 p.m. HOUSE-EMPTYING HANDICAP (Standing Record, 1 min. 11 secs., by the Three Brothers Mucus, the Men Toad's, at Bolivar's Varieties, Battersea, June 27th, 1898) :

Singing Navvies with "The Larboard Watch"	Owe ½ min.
Musical Clowns playing "Carnival de Venise"	,, ¼ ,,

Perpetrators, male or female, of dud ballad alluding to Ireland as "the brightest gem in the Empire's crown" . .	Scratch
Stinkerini's Performing Dogs and Monkeys	Rec. 15 secs.
Male Quartette in "Man the Lifeboat" .	„ 20 „
Handbell Ringers, Sword Swallowers, and Harness Turns	„ 25 „
Comic Singers alluding to the *pulex irritans*, the mother-in-law, or to Nausea-Marina	„ 30 „

3.0 till 5.15 p.m. STANDING JUMPS (Habitual Patrons of Matinee Performances only)—First Prize, The Basket of Flowers nightly passed up by the Musical Conductor to Miss —— —— (and haven't the Property Masters of the metropolis fairly nursed it!). The jumps are to be acquired on the crude grain spirit invariably sold as whisky and brandy at certain variety theatres. Competitors taking soda or seltzer water to carry 7 lb. extra; youthful scions of the aristocracy who can truthfully say—betwixt you and me, man to man, pal to pal, 'and to 'and, and 'eart to 'eart—that they have within the past month knocked a stranger's glass over and then flatly declined to apologise, allowed one gill.

As in this practical and prosaic time, when a peninsula in Manchuria can be rendered perfectly untenable by a protracted rain of cast-iron kitcheners filled with the most objectionable explosives and fired across six miles of the Yellow Sea, it makes deuced little difference, I think, whether you are elbowed by the makings of to-morrow's red-hot divorce case at an athletic meeting in the afternoon, or sit next the week-

end's flash suicide at the Opera in the evening, I fully intend going.

I am too pressed for time just now to discuss with you the matter of a suitable background for your little French friend's prospective photograph, but I do not endorse the close-clipt yew, the lichened wall, the white-stoled lilies' bending stalks, idea; surely an expectant attitude on the kerb-stone outside the County Fire Office would be more akin to accuracy; but in the matter of Lavinia Rowbotham's ailment, pray tell her I have seen Dr Morbus Brighteye, and he does not consider that a floating kidney is any bar to early matrimony, especially in the case of a debutante with fifteen hundred a year. Of course, from a medical point of view, it should be stitched down, and it would quite depend on Lavinia herself whether the stitches showed. Even if they did, she could have them finished off with some silk cords and tassels (which are still enjoying a truly remarkable vogue) or a couple of chiffon bows of some bright shade; but the point is probably quite unimportant to a bridegroom who has long ceased wondering what bread-and-cheese is like to live on, and whose dress clothes are so shiny that he can see to shave in them. It was not a heroic act of his when declaring his passion to magnify his captaincy into a majority, although had Lavinia been passing the St James's several hours later,

as I was, when he was being thrown out after celebrating her acceptance, she would have had to admit that he was drunk enough for a Field Marshal, at least! As one of the buds of Flying Fox's year, she is probably none too squeamish, however; I confess that I never set eyes on her without calling to mind those frayed and worn, but still unpunctured, rubber tyres which they show in the windows of the cycle shops on Holborn Viaduct ticketed "Been in constant use for five years!" She compels one to admit at last that she has not carried a plain gold wedding ring in her purse for sixty months for nothing!

And so adieu for to-day, kid; Mars in conjunction with the Sun attracts me to the park.

Yours always,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE III

R.Y.S. *Dido*, OFF COWES, *August 4th.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

How admirably, I must say, is everything in life ordained by prescient Kismet! Fate, for instance, clearly forsees the appalling total of torn frills which, at the close of the season, must be replaced by new ones, and with August gives the social rosebud just the time she needs by putting her into flannel—and Cowes. Then how the sea-water bath, distributed over her fagged limbs by means of a small organdie-muslin bag filled with bran and benzoin, which Aphrodite so loved, that she arose from it each morning only with the greatest possible reluctance, causes her to glow and tingle! Under its melli-fluent influences I have already ceased to trouble my head about Evelyn, who, with a system of love-making so amateurish that it comes within the Colonial Secretary's definition of "unskilled labour," wishes to know the reason for my not writing to him!

Is not that a man all over? He regards plighting his troth in the light of setting his foot upon my neck and holding me in bondage till he is ready to slay his passion by indulging it. No, no, Sammy Slow, no modern woman with a grain of sense ever sends little notes to an unmarried man—not until after she is married, anyway. Moreover, most girls are partial to most things that begin with f—flowers, and fruit, and flirting, for three instances—and it is not because you squeezed my waist at Ascot that I should now sit at your feet and gaze into your eyes till I die with my head in your lap. When a man extorts from a woman a promise of love, he looks for a certain show of gratitude with it. Little less exacting than the crude Walcheren Islander who expects his bride elect to go out into the fields to gather sufficient wild carrots to pay the priest and to stand and sell them in the market-place without violating the proprieties, he digs no subway himself; even should he make a sacrifice at all, it is only with an incipient heartache and a profound conviction of regret to follow.

Men are creatures of insane impulses; recall, if you please, Archie Toddington, whose wardrobe (since he never went out until the evening) consisted entirely of dress suits and overcoats. I am inclined to the belief, by the way, that he was but one of a numerous type, for I heard them talking at dinner the other evening of a certain

young gentleman, the son of a rural Bishop, who once took his father to dine at the Orleans Club, the boy belonging only to a now defunct institution called the Pelican besides. Now the Prelate was not without some misgivings concerning the Orleans as a manger for the cloth, but whatever were his prejudices they were dissipated on the instant of his entering the dining-room, at the sight of a gentleman, immaculately clean and most correctly clothed, who was dining all alone off a long-bone chop, a little toast, and—a pot of tea!

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Bishop, as he took his seat, "I had no idea, Octavius, that the members of this club had such simple, pastoral tastes. I am indeed agreeably surprised to find that one of them at least drinks tea with his dinner."

"I ask your pardon, sir," replied Octavius, "but will you kindly speak a little lower lest Mr Thornhill should overhear you. Tea, I would not impertinently remind you, is an ideal beverage for a deep thinker, and my friend yonder is quite the ruling brain of the *Athenæum*. His cogitative faculties, I have no doubt, are even now immersed in some profound distich for his next edition."

Never did a Bishop feel in better company; whereas, as a matter of fact, Mr Thornhill, being only just out of bed, was taking his "early evening breakfast" and inwardly debating whether he should devote himself to Bessie Bellwood at

the Pavilion or Lottie Dettmar at the Trocadero, and which of the two houses possessed the easiest fauteuils to go to sleep in!

But I am neglecting Archie Toddington of the chronic dress suit.

On a certain Sunday evening at nine o'clock, then, Archie, feeling fearfully stale and solitary, and, like all misanthropists believing himself to be the repository of the whole world's suffering, strolled into St George's Chapel in Albemarle Street, pausing on the threshold to cough, lest his sudden entrance should cause too great a shock. It was an "after dinner evensong," and the little proprietary chapel-of-ease (now alas! swept away) where evening dress was "indispensable" in the sofa-pews, optional in the gallery, and ladies' bonnets only allowed in the organ-loft, was very full of smart people who had dined late. Brave men, groomed to the last gasp of dilettante exquisiteness, and fair women from whose billowing bosoms diamonds flashed like beams of white light from Gris-nez, sat and listened with polished languor to a short, thin discourse on "Behold a woman came." Then the organ commanded closer attention by uttering an imperious peal, and Mrs Cora Brown-Potter, looking like every bird in the tree, in a ravishing low-necked evening frock of amber silk covered with black Chantilly lace, rendered slightly less *décolletté* by a white lace berthe, headed by a

band of chiffon, and depending from the bared shoulders, stood forth. The hat surmounting her shapely head was of white transparent lace-straw; its raised crown, supported by circles of mauve and white lilac in entrancing combinations, the cachepeignes being black cherries and the faint perfume of fleur-qui-meurt giving the correct signature to the only possible chapeau in which the beautiful wearer could accurately realise the entangled and difficult "atmosphere" of *The Holy City*. It was simply perfection; for a burnt-brown straw, a sheaf of Annunciation lilies, two silver thistles, a pot of musk, a splash of amethyst miroir velvet—all of which suggestions emanated from amiable worshippers in the front rows—would have ruined all.

And then she spoke her allotted lines—slowly and with measured bleat at first, but louder and louder as the organist, warming to his work, took up the running, until finally she broke into the melody itself, and ——

Archibald Toddington sank down within his pew, deeply and seriously (though happily not fatally) stung. Thirty years had rolled away in half as many minutes, and once again he was a boy at Eton, hopelessly in love with the little daughter of the boat-builder, and fearing nothing but a famine at Layton's. Remorse is, after all, a thoroughly wholesome and healthy secretion: with what bitter anguish do we recall those awful

early virtues which we now know to have been only wasted opportunities!

His penitence was very real: from that hour forward he resolved to reform and lead a new life. He would begin by having a ginger ale, neat, at the Badminton, that he might the sooner grow accustomed to that harmless stomachic; again, should he live to be a hundred, he would be scrupulously careful in future always to substitute "blooming" for the ordinary embellishments to conversation. Then with regard to ——

An unbidden sigh came from the very pit of his stomach as he dived his right hand into an unusually deep pocket inserted in the left breast of his waistcoat and pulled out about two hundred of their visiting cards. With moisture in his eyes he read the top one:

> Of course I forgive you, but as for believing you, that is quite another thing. Am leaving Lupus Street to-night. Going to some ripping rooms in Claverton Street, close to the old pitch. Have changed name to Ida Onslowe. If you come up bring some cold stuff from that shop in Piccadilly, as my landlady's brat has got the ringworm, and I am not taking any tiffin from downstairs. *Do* come. KID.

Poor little Ida; and what a thorough little sportsman she always was! Yet she was but

one out of his last two hundred, who, as their bits of pasteboard attested, haled from half the best-known streets and roads of the honeymoon districts of this great metropolis. He rose to leave the chapel and walked towards the door with the cards still clutched in his right hand. As he joined the fringe of the communicants who were politely shoving one another through the exit, he could move forward only at the rate of six inches a shuffle; but here again was a blessing in disguise. For as he passed through the porch, there stared him in the face a brass-bound box of polished oak, having in its lid an oblong aperture, above which was inscribed in white and gold:

"FOR THE ADDRESSES OF THOSE WHO WISH TO BE VISITED BY THE CLERGY."

Without an instant's hesitation he raised his hand and dropped the ten score cards into the slit; so real, so visible, so conspicuous was the peril of these girls, that no movement tending to their redemption could possibly be adjudged too momentous. Experiencing that peculiar glow of satisfaction which comes of earning a halo and earning it cheaply, Archibald Toddington turned to the right into Piccadilly, and strolled down the incline to the Badminton.

Never in your life I suppose, dear, have you

tasted a drink called "Three-cornered Sarah," which is said to have been invented by a subaltern of the King's Dragoon Guards, stationed at Rawal Pindi, who wished not only to forget the past, but to be oblivious of the present and contemptuous of the future? Anyway, Archie fell in with a doughty representative of this famous regiment, and, after a couple or three goes of "Sarah," felt like carrying civilisation into the Congo, or putting down an insurrectionary hill tribe single-handed. The spell of the amber silk frock covered with black Chantilly was broken into pieces and the pieces lost; the enchantment of the white lilac hat with the black cherry cachepeignes had evaporated into thin air, and been blown into Iceland by a gale from the south. Within one short hour, indeed, Archie, who had undertaken not only to give the Dragoon a merry evening, but to ring in miracles on him in the peacherino line, so poignantly repented the loss of all his addresses, that he was found hammering on the door of the chapel and objurgating the housekeepers of the surrounding premises because none of them knew where lived the old verger-johnnie, or whatever they call him, who kept the keys of the place! Thus the cards were for ever lost to him; though doubtless the spiritual needs of the addressees received attention, for that the old-fashioned, one-idea'd bigot is not believed to exist in the Church in the present

day was amply proved on the night when the Bishop of Barchester was followed from St James's Hall to the very doorstep of the house opposite the Green Park, where he was staying for the May meetings, by a foreign lady who thought that she recognised him. As she dumbly but persistently refused to accept his assurances that he had never met her in society—and he would now probably deny the incident in toto, but that I have, curiously enough, preserved the cutting from the church paper to which he wrote for editorial advice as to how a gentleman should get rid of a female who was too persistent in the street, and the editor suggested going into a Turkish bath and suddenly disrobing—he had finally to make a swift bolt indoors and slam the door violently in her face. So loud and despotic, however, was the subsequent knocking, that the Bishop himself returned to find not only the lady, but a police constable, on the doorstep, and about three thousand idle persons gathered around them. "I 'umbly beg yer lordship's pardon for knockin'," said the policeman, respectful to the verge of servility, "but when you was a-lettin' this young lady out just now, you shut her skirt in the door!"

I have often thought that if only our police-constables, who affect to be *Curii*, but in private live like Bacchanals, were drawn from a more æsthetic class than is the case, they would, by

exercising a greater sense of delicacy, cause less suffering to the susceptible. Let me illustrate my contention by admitting that I have for years been endeavouring in vain to find out what it is that the loquacious hawker at the street corner has in the pillbox. I have listened to his breezy bleat so often that I know his yarn by heart (and sometimes "give" it in congenial company), but never yet have I heard its conclusion, nor have I beheld the little animal. On every occasion, just as the Autolycan has been going to raise the lid of the box, odious P.C. 797 has arrived from the clouds and blue-pencilled the show. Only yesterday, at the corner of a *cul-de-sac* in Regent Street, I came upon the patient person of bilious temperament and doubtless sedentary habits, who experiences so many commercial cancellations at the hands of the police. As usual, he had an admiring, if not a monied audience; and he cried:

"Laidies an' gentlemen,—May I claim yer kind an' perlite attention for the purpus' of introjuicin' to yer notice a livin' novelty from the new world beneath the Southern Cross, where every prospec' pleases, an' female modesty is so pronounced that the clean things from the laundry is never aired afore the kitchen fire for fear of upsettin' the mental balance o' the butcher's boy when he brings round the j'int for dinner, an' looks in at the airy winder? Thanks. I 'ave

'ere—I say I 'ave 'ere, contained in this small box, the only insec' overlooked by Adam when he took his seat on the rainbow to christen the marv'llous creations o' the animal world. It is well known to, an' 'ighly respected by, the black aboriginals o' Burragorang, from its intelligent 'abit of manufacturin' its own lan'marks as it traverses the jungle, by spittin' on the grass an' stoppin' it from growin', thus renderin' return easy an' loss-o'-bearin's out o' the question. Though many attempts 'ave been made to subdue, an' so tame, the little creature, the feat has been accomplished only thrice within history; once by Timandra Ventidius, the Macedonian Amazon as led her countrymen in the insurrection against Turkey, armed with nothin' but an ordinary 'at-pin (tho' carryin' a quartern o' chloroform in her jeans, in case she should fall into the 'ands o' the Turks); secondly, by the celebrated Austrian savant, Yagerwohl, patentee o' the world-famed sensitised toilet-ware for hospitals, which, ev'ry time a patient washes his 'ands causes a bell to ring in the matron's room; and, thirdly, by myself, who 'ad it from a well-known 'Arley Street medical man, what went off his dot after runnin'-up in a local billiard 'andicap, an' who is at present immured in a private 'ome for the potty, practisin' nursery-cannons on the kitchen dresser with a tomato, a Spanish onion, an' a 'ard-boiled egg. But mere assertion is 'ardly the same thing

as proof; what each one of you a-standin' round me requires is ocular demonstration. With yer kind permission I shall therefore proceed at once to——"

"Pass away, now, pass away!" cried P.C.s 797 and 798 in chorus, and the persecuted wizard of the pillbox, bearing his adversity with as philosophical a fortitude as he could summon, sighed heavily and sneaked off. But anon, anon.

By all who do not permit the state of the markets to interfere with social duty, Cowes Regatta is unanimously recognised as the only possible sequel to Goodwood; but the distinguished tenants of many of the tiny villas and cottages, half buried in the trees that cluster on the heights above the town, were witnesses of the diverting sequel to a much earlier festivity yesterday morning. But perhaps it would be better for me to present you with the events constituting the latest edition of The Earl and the Girl—to say nothing of the Countess—in their chronological order. Let us sit upon the ground, as Richard II. says.

You have heard of Lord Catterick, haven't you? A none too affluent but sound old sexagenarian sportsman, dear Kid, with a heart as big as a hyacinth farm in Zeeland, but matrimonially shackled to an ogress of fifty, too ill-tempered, domineering, and utterly unreasonable to exist save in a Trollopian novel. Colour is lent to the

supposition that he married her to win an after-dinner bet by his seemingly incurable mania for making love to every mortal thing in petticoats that crosses his path; though that may be no more than carelessness, since Virtue itself is only a continual struggle against the promptings of Nature, as I daresay you have found it. Moreover, he had been much impressed, ten or twelve years ago, by a certain passage in an erotic novel which said that the only thing to properly wake up a man suffering from acute melancholia, was a rapid love-affair with a flamingly red-haired woman, to damage whose reputation it would be necessary to hug her in broad daylight in front of the Mansion House—a none too accurate reference to Miss Jessica Dux, who is a pronounced blonde. Though only a cloak model, Miss Dux came, I understand, of a good, but impoverished family who for years accepted money reluctantly from relations, and, when these dried up, went fut. Then the seven noble girls drew lots to determine which one of them should sacrifice herself to save pater from going out to work, and—Jessica pulled out the black bean.

But for the incessant tight-lacing in the showrooms, the wearying attentions of the manager, and the grotesque air of immeasurable superiority assumed by the customers before whom she had to strut, to turn, to pose at command, clad in

creations of golden spider's-web, Jessica would cheerfully have dropped everything else to have stayed on at Madame Junon's, for though she didn't turn a very deep furrow in the pay roll, the work was very gratifying and her hips were much admired. Then, all on a morning early, Lord Catterick in new-milk innocence dropped in to see a frock "tried on" his liege-madam. His eyes encountered Jessica's; he pencilled a few warm words on a (must have been asbestos) visiting card, and that night Miss Dux made her first acquaintance with the half-guinea dinner at the Berkeley.

It was about four months later, or a week ago, that Lady Catterick opened a letter addressed to her husband which had come by the evening post. Seldom or never before had she descended to this particular meanness, but the indented die on the back of the envelope—"Impératrice et Cie, Clifford Street, W."—proved an irresistible lure, and she broke the seal before she fully realised what she was doing. And it was a half-dead woman she was, dear Pat, as her little grey eyes ran down the many items in a bill full fourteen inches long, with a total of £368, 18s. 4d., and a final tag to the effect that Impératrice et Cie would be glad to receive a cheque from his lordship at his early convenience!

Smothered gasps and little muffled screams escaped her as she read such lines as "Chestnut

Sunday, May 17th: Tagg's Island toilette of biscuit Donegal linen trimmed broderie Anglaise with Valenciennes insertions, £31, 10s.," and "May 22nd: Lemon-tinted chiffon Opera gown with corsage of pink fuchsias a la Philemon et Baucis, £47, 5s." Then came on "June 3rd: Ascot toilette of rose-silk voile over white louisine with Alençon flounces, £52, 10s.," and on the 6th: "Southend-on-Sea boudoir gown in crépe-de-chine, lined Japanese silk, £15, 15s.," followed by "Third-class railway fare of special-delivery porter (Saturday evening), 4s. 4d." Other entries, scarcely less disturbing, included a "Creation in white mousseline velours encrusted with black paillette (Lingfield Park), £63, 0s.," a "Golden straw plait chapeau with white feathers en suite, £7, 7s. 0d.," and, somewhat lower down, an "Evening frock of ultramarine chiffon embroidered silver sequins (Ponymoore's Ball), with bunches of shaded pink fruit on the décolletage, £21, 0s. 0d.," the lot amounting, as I said before, to the quite respectable sum of £368, 18s. 4d.! And all this, my dear, to a woman whose very feminine idea of limiting male extravagance consisted in continually demonstrating how frocks could be bought for less money than suits of clothes!

Between 7 P.M. and half-past midnight, Lady Catterick fairly fed on that bill, like the "elderly naval man," who "ate that cook in a week, or less," and the poison had time to soak in. So

that when, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 12.50 A.M., Catterick's uncertain footsteps sounded on the stairs, the Countess arose half-mast high in her bed and cleared her throat to get rid of some honest prose—for, though an unfaithful husband may dabble heavily in poetry, his deceived wife will in nine cases out of ten rely (while speech lasts, at any rate) wholly upon such plain sentences as drop from the tongue without apparent effort. Addressing him as "you Tarquin of Tagg's Island!" and "you gin-and-cockling Lothario!" by turns—the latter being an undoubted allusion to the Southend item — her ladyship crowded enough novel and up-to-date abuse into the next twenty minutes to have warranted the assumption that her life had been spent among soles and flounders rather than Courts and coronets; yet Catterick yawned through it all in absolute indifference. In reality, his oblivion was due to alcohol and, with the highly-rectified cunning which accords with alcoholisation and protects its votaries, he made no attempt to cut into trouble of any sort, though here and there in the indictment he caught a fugitive word which seemed to call for thought. When the Countess's vituperation had run its course, therefore, he stumbled across the chamber—or lurched across the room, if you prefer it—and, laying the hand of remonstrance on his wife's frilled shoulder, observed:

"Goo' ni', Rox'lana, goo' ni'. I'll say wha've got t' say in morn'ng: much too tire' t' ni'. But this mush I *will* r'mark: you're a swee' woman, you're a p'ffic lady, also a d'vout lover of Art, 'n'earnest stood'nt of Lit'rachoor, an' a class'cal 'thority on Hist'ry, but as a wom'n of th' world—I say as a wom'n of th' world, Rox'lana —you're a varnish! Goo' ni'!"

The rapidity with which the sound of his snoring succeeded his exit, caused the worried woman even more uneasiness than the first sight of the modiste's bill had done. Surely no guilty man could fall asleep so readily? Racked by the anguished reflection that people who are supposed to marry largely for the sake of being happy may be presumed, if they subsequently remain silent, to have gained what they desired, Lady Catterick passed a sleepless night, and turned up at the breakfast table next morning looking positively hideous.

The Earl was, on the contrary, quite breezily cheerful. Adopting a tone of amused pity—a no-matter-what-you-do-it-runs-in-your-family air —he even demanded the offending milliner's bill, adding:

"I hate to seem to reproach you in any way, Roxalana, but upon my honour you were the human limit last night! And your phrases!— odds, blud o' the murdered missionaries in Zanzibar, your phrases! Where do you cull it

all? From which of the Sunday penn'orths do you draw inspiration? Nevertheless, despite your eccentricities, I will remain your friend. Give me the obnoxious invoice—good—ere the lamps are lighted it shall be manifest to at least one practical joker that his sense of humour has got beyond proper control. *Adios;* I shall not be in to lunch."

As a "rare old plant" this successful bit of bluff was about a stone and a neck in front of "the ivy green," yet, once outdoors, Lord Catterick's demeanour became serious rather than jubilant. An appearance in the Divorce Court he feared less on account of any social paralysis which might supervene than of absolute financial death. No matter at what cost, therefore, Impératrice's bill would have to be met that day.

To look towards Israel for assistance was useless. Lord Catterick had a record in Jewry that the Shylocks themselves kept sweet only as an antidote to gluttony. He turned, therefore, to an old Harrow chum who was now an electioneering agent, with an invalid wife in the Engadine, an easy-going roysterer who was nearly always at the Club in order to get his affectionate wife's letters, and so avoid the fearful scene that would happen if one of those epistles fell into the hands of his typewriter. This good soul grew a trifle beetle-browed at first, but eventually

filled out a pink slip for £370, on the strict understanding that it didn't extend over Saturday, and Catterick started for the bank with as much front as a fortification.

Probably the world seems not so bad after all to the man who, having devoted the best part of the day to solicitation and whisky sours, has at last achieved his object, but the thing that did seem hard to Catterick was having to part with that £368 odd without keeping back a little bit of pewter for himself. Much ruminating seemed only to increase the hardship until, arriving at the milliners, he conceived and bare the brilliant scheme of paying £250 off the bill and reserving £120 for a brief congress of illicit joy away from town—why not a quiet and unpretentious run over to the Island? So entirely admirable did the idea seem that, having dropped the ten ponies to Impératrice's, he found it hard to hold himself down while a hansom carried him to Miss Dux's preposterously bijou flat. That self-same evening Miss Dux commenced her packing, and on the following day the pair set out for Cowes.

It was by the first post on the day following that of the Earl and the girl's departure, that a second envelope, bearing the indented die of the odious couturières in Clifford Street, turned up at the Catterick mansion, and all but decided the Countess to track down her husband and

shoot him. The "all but" took the shape of her family solicitor who, being personally desirous of showing up in the vicinity of Castle Garden, persuaded his client that it would be better to tickle the law into turning one foot-loose than to pay the extreme penalty for a man with a heart two sizes smaller than a golf ball. For, no longer to keep you in suspense, dear, the second communication from Impératrice's was far too significant to admit of doubt, and ran:

To bill delivered	£368 18 4
By Cash on account next day .	250 0 0
Balance . .	£118 18 4

P.S.—*The favour of your Lordship's cheque is politely but imperatively requested, since the person to whom the goods were supplied, by your Lordship's order and selection, has lately disappeared from her flat in Ridgmount Gardens, leaving nothing behind but an unsettled milk bill.* I. ET CIE.

I can safely leave to your vivid imagination the "scene," enacted within the range of the windows of Nubia House, which terminated this little comedy yesterday, for, notwithstanding Lady Catterick's pronounced hostility towards the Island and all its inhabitants since the day when a rustic clod of a railway porter stuck his head into the carriage in which she was travelling from Ventnor with her three somewhat shelf-worn sisters and addressing the quartette, all as sombre as convent postulants and erect as Easter

candles, asked gruffly, "All Cowes in 'ere?" she turned up full of vigour, accompanied by her solicitor and a couple of hunting crops!

The sailor-man who periodically goes ashore in the dinghy for letters, has just brought me a wire from dear Phyllis Waring—don't you remember how we all used to sing in muffled tones in the old dormitories at the *pensionnat:*

Me name's Betsy Waring,
Wot goes aht a-chairing?

—to say she cannot come yotting for a day or two, as she has lost the latchkey of her flat, and is quite unable to lock up until she gets another. With customary good nature, she lent it late the other evening to be dropped down the back of a young lady whose nose was bleeding outside the Continental, and it has not since been seen. It certainly was not in the young lady's garments when she was undressed at Vine Street police-station a little later on; everybody present can swear to that. She is coming over, however, on Thursday; meanwhile my curiosity to learn all about her fall-out with Eustace Doorstep (or whatever was his surname) comes near consuming me. As I think I once told you, Eustace lately heard from some busybody all about Phyllis's earlier *affaire* with Geoffrey, and he raged and stormed for a time like that spoiled and undersmacked brat who did not reach the

bazaar with his nurse until the gates were closed, and consequently "didn't get a drum." Eustace is one of those simple, countrified men who want to marry a girl who has loved no one else, but whom any amount of others have idolised from a respectful distance. What logic, or—want of it! Would the honeysuckle attract the bee if it yielded no pollen?

Yours, for the next twenty minutes on a deck-chair *couchant*, lazily absorbing Nature's sermon that lives in the blue vault above,

VI.

EPISTLE IV

HOTEL VASISTAS, DINARD, *Septembre 4re.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

I am pencilling these lines to you while eating strawberry ices under a warm sun in a perfectly idyllic garden full of royal roses, and within two rods and a bittock of a turquoise sea from which, just across a toy estuary, rise the imperishable crested beauties of St Malo. Here are aromatic breezes, American bars, health, vigour, culture, Parisian revue stars sea-bathing in picture hats and passionate silk stockings, the loveliest crevettes imaginable, well-aired beds, comely female servants strictly engaged without characters, petits-chevaux and the musical glasses; and still I am not happy. Since your two most prominent characteristics, next to your cheekbones, are curiosity and love of listening, I will tell you why. If there be any bottom to the theological dogma of that profound, albeit

prolix, metaphysician, Bhikku Ananda Maitriya, of Rangoon, there was a new star born in the Middle Way on Monday night, for during the small dog watches, Evelyn Godolphin Mountprospect, fourth and youngest son of the Earl of Atholbrose, passed in his dinner pail.

He met his end in the shape of the new regimental mess waistcoat, or rather in his suicidal efforts to get into it: he died of tight lacing. Poor little Evelyn! In fancy I can see the flush of anger on his cheeks, the contemptuous coiling of his spiral nostrils as he struggled vainly with the conquering corset, breaking a whalebone here or rending the broché-batiste there, but never quite succeeding in completing the frightful misplacement of the internal clockwork of the body which only the anatomist can fully describe, and the War Office is absolutely oblivious to. Sad indeed it is to see the very flower of military chivalry stagger and fall, not on the battlefield but the parade ground, there to lie prone with its staylaces cut, the while the Army Medical Corps burns a feather.

That I ever really felt up to breaking home ties for the boy's own sweet sake is extremely problematical. Society is an over-girled community and the debutante whose female parent cares nothing for decking her out and putting her where she will be well seen is apt to have her head turned by coach-panels as richly emblazoned

as are the Atholbrose's; they are cream and gold, you may remember, with the figure of a roysterer, rampant, in a restaurant, bar sinister, above the family motto "One more won't hurt us!" But Evelyn himself was something of a feather-weight; the clinging vine rather than the sturdy oak, and the direct antithesis to what a society schoolgirl designates a hummer. Though art-gallery and shop-broke, he was more fitted to become the dog Tray of a young married woman than the money-getter to a fashionable bride of his own; and his three brothers had been much the same.

For instance, Caedmon, the eldest, who in a previous state of existence had probably been a lowing white Chillingham bull-calf, had been reared side by side with a pretty chocolate-red Hereford cow with whom (to cut the bovine metaphor) he had made love from his perambulator in Kensington Gardens. Her name was Lorna Porter, and her family tree was every bit as genteel and starchy as the acacia itself. From Eton Caedmon had sent her pretty little weekly notes enclosing buttercups and daisies privately picked from *les plancher des vaches*—(Pray overlook it for once, dear. Phyllis Waring, just off to gather champignons, is chattering at my elbow, and the French language is *so* infectious!)—and from Oxford he consigned further fickle screeds and fritillaries—need I explain that I allude to

the wild flowers which abound at Abingdon and not to any kind of lingerie?

Miss Porter's people, however, entertained other matrimonial views concerning her, and eventually betrothed her to a South African person who proposed to settle something like forty-thousand a year on her for fencing foils and skipping ropes — indispensable articles in the daily pursuit of flexibility and youthfulness— alone. She being a Warwickshire beauty, her sacrificial outfit was built in Birmingham and her passage was booked to the Cape, whither she was shortly to proceed in the keeping of all manner of stern relations. To Caedmon, who suddenly made the belated discovery that years of propinquity had meant something more than mere lukewarm amusement, it was an overwhelming blow, nor could he discern the slightest prospect of ever again squeezing her velvety paws or treading delicately beneath the table on the only footwear in London which would have had Cinderella beaten to pulp. The thought was maddening; yet in Lorna's impending departure Caedmon could see nothing but his own finish—a year of reckless drinking, a month's disinheritance, a family reconciliation, and a hateful future with a homespun consort.

Gold—red gold which will achieve almost anything in existence save immunity from gout to the devotee of sparkling ales—was at length

accountable for Miss Porter finding on her window-sill one morning, an impassioned petition from Caedmon, in which he attempted to pour forth the left lobe of his soul, but only ran to about one composing-stick of third-class seaside-novelette dead-weight. Nevertheless his burning plea to be granted one brief evening of her society ere she passed out of his blighted life for ever, was expressed with sufficient clarity to appeal to any woman's inherited and cultivated love of playing with fire, and Lorna Porter inwardly and instantly resolved upon making the concession. No matter on how transparent a subterfuge, her last night in England should be given to Caedmon; her own hungering heart no less than her love for burning incense dictated it. She sent an unsigned wire to warn Caedmon that he might get his wish at any moment; after which she stood in front of her mirror and changed her jewellery six times while wondering what on earth could have first given her the idea that he was a sort of modern St Anthony at about five-stone-seven!

Now, waiting many days for a telegram in a West-end club which has been given over to the pail-and-brush mechanic for autumn renovation is not an ideal pastime for an epicure and a man of fashion. To be compelled to sit and yawn in an atmosphere of size and varnish, in halls temporarily tenanted by voluble and irascible

artisans to whom one's very presence in the month of holidays and deserted streets is sufficient evidence of one's constitutional bent for shifting the cut on the working classes, is singularly tortuous. Blobs of whitening are apt to fall in perilous proximity to one's coat; jets of slopwash descend suddenly in hazardous contiguousness to one's hat, until one grows in time to jump aside for one's very life out of the line of a swinging platform, or the range of a falling trestle, at the faintest echo of "Stan' by the sidebar rope, Josh!" or "Lower your endabit, Bill!"; yet for more than half a week Lord Caedmon bravely faced it all.

Then at last there came a wire. It was coded from the fair town whose name is so unpleasantly suggestive of cannibalistic intolerance of chastity —"Nuneaten, 5.24 P.M."—and it ran:

"*Little parcel will arrive Euston to-night*, 8.30, *legibly inscribed Fragile.*"

It bore no signature, not another word; that was all. Yet Caedmon, as he read it forty times, felt the sunshine penetrate his soul anew. There arose before his eyes a vista of a refined and beautiful girl in white Mechlin lace and orange-blossoms, turning from a chancel filled with tulips and palms and begonias and white hyacinths, on all of which the soft rose light filtered in through

a great stained east-window, to—to cast all aside for a vulgar assignation at a railway station! "Fragile" was not the word for it: it was frail beyond the limit of human comprehension.

With Lorna's self-reproachful adjective inscribed upon his brain, Caedmon jumped into a cab and drove to the most intensely respectable hotel in Berkeley Square, an establishment so finnickingly exclusive that it's maitre would hardly look at gold and lands unless tendered by one who had previously submitted references; and ordered dinner. Surely, he reasoned, if Lorna, for the old love's sake, were willing to incur this peril, she should be dragged to no ostentatious Palm Room, nor exposed to the leers of *hoi polloi* in the best-accredited "smart" restaurant. "Fragile!" Sweet vestal! Though she clearly realised the ineffable jeopardy in which the promptings of her heart involved her, her innate sense of culture made her shrink from the use of the meaner, but more appropriate vulgarism, "risky!"

Long before his time, and with the stealthy step of an ogre on his way to rob a cradle, Lord Caedmon alighted from a muffled brougham, passed beneath the frowning arch of Euston Station, and awaited the coming of the restaurant train from Warwickshire. And no sooner had it slidden silently in, than the door of a reserved-first opened, and Lorna Porter, apparently in

evening dress, but completely enveloped in a travelling cloak and hood of soap-sud grey, stepped out. Caedmon positively pounced upon her.

"How fearfy good of Twee-est to come!" he cried, taking both her hands in his.

"Oh, not so *vewy* fearfy, my twee," answered Lorna, for she too was an adept in the pidgin; adding with a wicked wistfulness in her great brown eyes, "though Twee-est would get awfy, *awfy* ratin' if pals found out, and Twee-est is scary of ratin'!"

"Twee-est let ratin' go hang; Twee give Twee-est deevie ickle dinnie, and Twee-est buck-up!" said Caedmon, consolingly; by which time they were mercifully at the brougham. But the same conversational fog enveloped his intellect throughout a long and elaborate dinner, and it was not until Lorna, who was quite a red-corpuscled person when she wished to be, had waited for it to lift until the coffee and liqueurs came, that she wondered whether it might be that he was squiffy. Not that such was the case at all, dear. In reality, he had brooded over her password "Fragile" until he had brought on a series of neurotic attacks which the French would call collectively *le petit mal.* At Market Harboro, two years ago, I had a hunter, a rare fleabitten grey, similarly affected. The unfortunate beast remembered having one day

staked himself on a thickset hedge, so that ever afterwards when he came to one, he dropped his ears, screwed his head slightly to the right, and, with wide-open eyes and tail erect, squatted. Caedmon's bleat was mild and vapid, but nevertheless regular so long as he prattled of the extraordinary vogue that *pendie* (appendicitis) was having; of the new restaurant being awfully *deevie* (delightful) but deucedly *expie;* of Lord Jimmie being fearfully *diskie* at finding his wife giving him some anti-drink stuff in his coffee at *brekker*, simply because he occasionally got so frightfully *moppie;* but whenever through Lorna's omission to utter a weary, or an acid, "Really?" there came a pause, he caught sight of the one word "FRAGILE!" emblazoned on the wall, and, like my old grey, he died away behind the saddle, and tried to swallow his palate.

Dinner over, Lord Caedmon led Lorna to the Billiard Room where nobody ever went. The place was, as usual, empty and shadowy, whereupon Caedmon instantly—rang loudly for the marker. Neither this servant or Caedmon observed any peculiarity in the demeanour of Miss Porter as she opened the game in effective style by stringing together 17, nor did she pass any remark when she broke down at her next stroke through using the jigger at a very simple, single-cushion cannon. As Caedmon went to the

table, however, Lorna left the room, presumably to chalk her cue or something, and—well, that was the last that was seen of her!

His lordship, suspecting nothing, waited five minutes after taking an ineffective shot, and then lit a cigarette. After ten minutes he grew uneasy; after twelve, a second footman came in and mentioned the fact that "her ladyship" had been gone some little time, in a hansom! As the man ceased speaking and walked away, the dreaded word appeared in letters of fire upon the wall, and the future lord of Atholbrose gasped for breath and clenched his fists.

"I beg y'r lordship's pardon, but is y'r lordship feelin' faint; the room *is* somewhat 'ot?" asked the marker.

"Naw, naw," groaned Caedmon in tones strangely Irvingian, "b-b-but tell me, man, what is your personal conception of the meaning of 'fragile'?"

The man went as pink as a lobster cutlet at Hampton Court, but parleyed, politely:

"Y'r lordship's pleased to be facetious, but probably y'r lordship's 'eard 'ow I've got the sack over it?"

"Over what, pray?"

"The new spirit-glasses, y'r lordship. I've been shockin' unlucky with 'em I'll admit, y'r lordship, but oh! they *are* fraygile an' no kid! That word was stencilled on the case as they

arrived in, an' William, the carver, he says to me at the time, y'r lordship, 'Henry,' he says, 'every time as you handles these glasses,' he says, 'bear that word in mind—Fraygile. It's French,' he says, 'an' it means, "Bound to be Broke, Anyway,"' he says, an' it's my humble opinion, y'r lordship——"

"Enough! My hat and stick, at once!" shouted Caedmon, and strode out of the place. "Of course, of course, fool that I am, I see it all now!" he wailed as he strode up Mount Street; "she referred to her promise to that damned South African!"

Plunging his fists into his breeches pockets and pulling out two brimming handsful of gold and silver, he thrust them upon an Italian murderer who, though curfew had long sounded, stood churning from an automatic piano the symphony to—

> "Will you—be true—to aeies—of blue
> When they look into aeies of ba-rown?"

and plunged into the velvet darkness of Grosvenor Square.

Only yesterday I received a lengthy epistle from Mrs Mortimer Toddpush, who left town about a week ago in order to witness the Passion Play at Horitz, but sidetracked at Zermatt after hearing in Paris how Eve, a hussy who also made shell boxes at Bohmerwald, had secretly

married Adam, who also stoked a steamer on the Po, while on tour in the provinces some seven months back, and would now be quite unable to appear for a few weeks. Eve's friend, too, a big shield-tailed python, had been in a state of torpor for an usually prolonged period after swallowing a tourist from the Highlands, so that the whole show was, if the accurate expression is admissible, clear out of plumb. Beyond the fact that a Reverend Mr Somebody, who was staying at the famous Smearkase Hotel half way up the Matterhorn, had stepped through a back door in the dark and fallen a mile, more or less, down the glacier (though the more pious of the guides assured the rest of the party that the old gentleman would have earned his harp three times over before striking the bottom) there seemed to be nothing doing at Zermatt, more particularly since the chubby bridegroom and touch-me-not bride in whom local interest mainly centred, were not speaking to one another when the post left, having quarrelled as to which loved the other the more, and each being afraid to give in for fear of offending the other.

But this sort of fever usually subsides, I am told, within a month, man's inborn nature being to philander, often to the dire distress of the trusting young wife who fondly imagines that a husband to be constant should be frequent. I remember hearing (no matter how) when last I

was in Brighton—that very stamping ground for honeymooners and others who carry their happiness about with them—of a certain old gentleman who was ventilating, in the smoking-room of one of the hotels, his views upon a current *cause célèbre*. Incidentally he averred that it was all very well for a man to go into the witness-box and swear that he had never under any circumstances been untrue to the partnership entered into at the altar rails; it was better still if he could induce the jury to believe him; yet no married man could absolutely *prove* that he never had sinned—on that point he would freely wager a thirty-shilling hat!

Then there arose from a corner seat a young gentleman who had Percy literally stamped upon him, and who had been unable to keep his cigarette alight for yawning, and he claimed that hat.

"And I invite you to substantiate your claim, sir," rejoined the pleasant old gentleman.

"Oh, it's an absolute walk-over!" cried Percy, with another yawn, "my wife and I were married only yesterday afternoon, and—er, well, we've only just come down to breakfast!"

Highly interesting as this explanation may seem, it was, after all, mere baby food compared to the diverting details which each of the other twenty-seven gentlemen had to invent at a moment's notice when asked by his wife why *he*

had not instantly and peremptorily laid claim to the thirty-shilling hat.

Speaking of winning wildly sporting wagers, I suppose that all will admit that Society contains no more beautiful or accomplished woman than Lady Ellaline Dives, yet I hate her with a great personal hatred, if only for the mean way in which she welshed—that is the hard but accurate appellation—me out of a fiver at the Cossie's Club only a week before I left England. You know the Cossie's, of course? It was of the parent club of them all that Io Mayleigh (who has emptied her Philistine life of everything but dogs) wrote:

> "Observe the erstwhile Tub Hotel;
> Note the 'B.T.,' or tea-room smell;
> Ensconced behind its muslin blinds,
> Now matrons with contented minds,
> Discuss, with much patrician fun,
> The tea—the cake—the buttered bun."

Well, in the course of an impersonal discussion at the Cossie's on the mistakes of anatomy, I, who have fed up on the subject, offered to bet anyone in the room a fiver that she had a vermiform appendix, and Ellaline Dives took me on. And as soon as the money was posted and covered, we adjourned to the Gazing Room, where she showed us the scar where she had had it removed!

Mightily close to sharping, don't you think?

I felt much inclined to have her up before the committee; yet, poor thing, she needs the fiver more than I do, for, owing to the fabulous prices paid by our Army in South Africa for petits fours and plovers' eggs, her income will be sorely depleted for the next century or so. I know quite well, dear, that her sweet but small house in South Audley Street—squeezed in between the wine merchant's and the coachbuilder's it looks just about a convenient size for a convivial tomtit—holds so many "auctioneers," as she calls them, that she and Sir Edward habitually sit on the stairs, owing to the men-in-possession occupying all that remains of the crested saddlebag suite. Even their faithful butler resigned with a curse after jabbing a hole about as big as Pimlico in his left hand, whilst endeavouring to open a sevenpenny tin of sheep's tongue, though Lady Ellaline adroitly arranged with the hospital authorities to inform the Press that it was *gastrodynia*, induced by a surfeit of foie gras. To repair all these ravages, Lady Ellaline lately accepted a roving commission from Messrs Outsize and Squeale, the distinguished hosiers; for if, as she truly says, Lady Barnhowrie can accept an appointment to sell cod liver oil, and the Countess of Barcalwhey can turn her impoverished self into a limited company—oho! Bankers: the Hole Under the Hearthstone!—to supply all who will buy with fresh eggs and butter (which she

delivers daily in her own motors), then "why not your little Ellaline?" Nowanights therefore at the small dance, the man who gets a polka with her must breathe a couple of dozen of silk socks or blue gridiron singlets into her shell-like ear; she will not grant even a galop under twelve fine flannel shirts with tucked or pleated fronts and necks, finished with French muslin collars for six guineas, which (next to her reliable bullet-proof travelling nighties for co-respondents) is her "star" line. It must be anything but the pleasantest of work, however, for I am told that the Duchess of Whitehall handed her a fearful dab in the eye on the Stand on the Champagne Stakes day at Doncaster, simply because she had asked, incautiously but purely in a business way, "Aren't those pink silk pants of the dear Duke's getting woefully shabby?"

Excepting only the two or three English theatrical hussies who purposely return from the water to the wrong bathing tents—Number 12 instead of Number 21, and so on—with the deliberate intention of being suddenly discovered by some brilliantined and bearded fool of a Frenchman, whom they then send to fetch from their rightful disrobing places, garments which are supposed to have no public career before them, we do not bathe at Dinard: rather do we diligently "sand." To actually enter the dishevelling surf is to display an excess of zeal only

equalled by the cock who crowed himself overboard from the bowsprit of Lord Dufferin's yacht in his frantic attempts to salute the rising sun in Scandinavia; but I think if only you could have seen me walking the plank promenade on the *plage* this morning in a skin-tight silk suit of bereavement violet, with silk stockings to match and chrome strapped shoes with paste buckles, you would have admitted, in disagreement with the *passé* soprano who budded too late, that there are other ways of securing public attention besides giving lessons on the posthorn from the top of Nelson's monument. For a girl to simulate a pretence of using the hot sea-water footbath which is brought to her from the beach-cauldron on returning to her *cabinet de bain* is surely less fuzzy than the male Berkshire pretence of kissing all the pretty women and extorting silver from the men under the name of "Hocktide tutty" (and you can safely bet a level pony if the custom had been to get the money out of the women and kiss the men, it would have been entombed with Alumid, whose last favourable Press notice appeared in the Domesday Book!); and neither puritanical flam nor structural imperfections need stand in the way of her extending the joyous mitt to her pals to join her in a cigarette in her machine, since the floor and the seats are never, like those of the archaic Margate article, so soaking wet that you cannot sit down

without ruining your *création*. Unfortunately the French jump too precipitately at conclusions, and, though it takes a pretty good deal at any time to create surprise at a Gallic watering-place, a distinctly false and an altogether too comprehensive impression of pudic British maidenhood has been indelibly stamped on the minds of the irrepressible *gommeux* here through one of their number having politely inquired of one of the copper-haired drabs on the steps of her obscure hotel the other morning if there was anything that he could do for her, and received the reply:

"Oh, it's very sweet of you, old dear, but if you'd give us a kiss, stand us a bottle, tell us an easy blue story, and take us into the Casino to show us how to play those 'little horses,' I should take it pal-ish, for what with your croupiers speakin' so quick and usin' their rakes so handy, all as I seem to do is to plank down my quid and take up nothing!"

Not that they really are ignorant of *petits-chevaux* and *roulette*, of the conventions of continental hotel life or—anything else! for, only yesterday, having received but few visitors, one of them took a camel-hair brush and a bottle of boot-varnish, and deftly inscribed upon her door the double-zero, and, within the next five minutes——

But the tiny red-brown fishing-boat which has

been threading its way between the pygmean rocky islets in the bay, now touches the beach, whither I fly to glean new schemes of colour from the glint of the dying mackerel.

Tiens, kid,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE V

EATON SQUARE, *Tuesday, October 3rd.*

MY DEAR PATRICIA,—

Let me implore you at the outset to repress the hilarity which any reasonable person must naturally feel at the sight of a quite unexpected letter in my familiar handwriting, for I am in no joking mood to-day. In short, there have been ructions here; I have read them the Riot Act with the stringbark on it and locked myself in my own apartments; for, even if I had entertained no thought of melting to-morrow before the warm rays of a tear-blotted cheque for the price of a new dinner frock, there is something so incomparably more dignified about an exit with dilated nostrils and a defiant snort than in a meek slink-off in the soul-grilling fit of remorse which is bound to follow a return to baneful Belgravia from so sweet a living toy as Dinard.

And what, pray, had *I* to do with the fact that reliable domestic servants were not to be

got; what (advancing another pace) that, even when captured occasionally, they rapidly became unreliable in a household where, when Rio Tinto's stood at 62, an operatic artiste arose from the floral centre-piece of a banquet served with Roman splendour and sang the menu, course by course; while, two days later, when Rio's dropped to one-and-eight a quire, "the Poor's Rates put in" and pinched the very dining table? No Countess in the Peerage who habitually had less than seventy men staying in the house at the same time could possibly get servants to accept such elementary principles of give and take! But it was when Féo rorted me upon my frequent absences from her house—"her house," my griefs! — that the proud chieftain's daughter moulted an eagle's feather.

"And a model house it is, madam!" I cried, with the withering bitterness of the impoverished nobleman whose I.O.U. for a-pint-and-two-slices had been scorned by the korfy-stall keeper, "a mighty regular and methodical house! Its many virtues, too humorous to mention, lie in the broken decanter at the foot of your dressing-table, the gold kid Court slipper behind the dining-room clock, the bottle of Odol on the drawing-room hearthrug; or they are to seek among the tennis balls in the music case, in the nest of mice beneath the broken wires of the piano, or in the sanitary dustbin wherein profane hands deposited

my treasured button from Jan Kubelik's dress waistcoat! Od's, hog's puddings and hung beef! if the house round the corner in Lower Belgrave Street of the motherly old lady in the black satin skirt and the red velvet bonnet, who got three months last Saturday, was a more 'disorderly' house than this is, then my reason's twisted and my name's M'Gizzick!"

Here, locked in my vestal chamber which is sufficiently contiguous to the kitchen to afford that peculiar atmosphere of internecine culinary warfare familiar to all inhabitants of Flatland, will I dip into the Diary which I found upon the boat between St Malo and Southampton, and which, very curiously, refers to the three giddy gushers of the obscure hotel at deevie Dinard. It is obviously in the handwriting of a married man of the middle station, whom a vagrant generosity would impel to look into shop windows at articles ticketed "Suitable present for a barmaid" and whom a deeper-rooted penuriousness would incite to haggle with his wife at parting as to his share of the expense of framing and glazing the judicial separation order which she has obtained against him; and, roughly pencilled in a scribbling book, it runs—

Monday, Sept. 1*st.*—It is now nine days since any caller other than a dun or a peddler of washleathers has entered my office, the last prospective client of good intent

having been Mr Asphalte, the famous turf-accountant from the lamp-post at the corner of Bucklersbury. His suggestion that I should receive telegrams on his behalf, also ninepence in the £ out of the Sender's losings, I foolishly declined to entertain, over-estimating, probably, the value of the commission which I had just received from Miss Béguinette Strathcona, of Broad Court Mansions, to find her a sober and presentable "mother" for Thursday afternoon next, when she has to interview the family solicitors of the Earl of Guernsey, who is settling five thousand a year upon her on condition that she never misses the last bus, or something. The young Earl would probably have married the bird could he have broken her of her artless habit of joining in the choruses whenever he took her to a music hall; though the interesting fact remains that what will lose a deserving girl a nobleman's partnership will not necessarily cost her his patronage. But where the brimstone is my personal discomfort to end? If I attempt to go across to the "Green Man" I shall get a judgment-summons on the way, and if I don't go across to the "Green Man" I shall die of thirst; meanwhile—Somebody in the outer office! Will you step in, please? Well, well, well! May I be—er, yours and so forth; my old chums Billie Bunn and Dickie Scales! This is the sort of meeting that makes work for barmen; say, boys, were there any signs of a seedy old devil with a black leather bag around the doorway as you came in? No? Then all is quiet in the Shipka Pass. Come across the road!

Tuesday, Sept. 2nd.—My oath! there were no bottle-green winged insects on last night as a model of a quiet, intellectual little evening, but—I really do wish that I could rest my head for awhile on something extremely soft and yet intensely cold. Rather took their hind wheels off, I think, by the way I mixed the Moselle cup! Absolutely astonished myself; though it only shows you what you could do if you could command the materials. Am rather

taken with the Run-across-to-the-Republic—(*Vive l'drapeau rouge!*)—notion, too, and don't see why I *shouldn't* go as their joint guest, seeing that they have won an independency at old Ebor; and more especially since I have volunteered to stake them to three little Broad Court chorus chicks, neighbours of Béguinette's, that I hear have gone to Dinard. Heigho! Had *some* men but one-fifth of what any successful stockbroker would consider an absurdly insufficient income, what pure *jouisseur's* would some men be; a bit pale in the morn, perhaps, but growing ripe as luncheon time arrived, and rubicund at eve with the rubicundity that comes only of repeated "splits." Funny thing I should dream only last night that I was counting money!

Wednesday, Sept. 3rd.—The Channel a positive dream—even though I have to close one eye to make out the shipping with any distinctness. We should hear considerably less about "the sinful artificiality of modern life," if some of the pessimists had, like myself, an occasional opportunity to make up for lost time. Man can't have a "past" if he doesn't possess the cash to overtake it. My vivid descriptions of the three birds are truly amazing—seeing that I barely remember one of them! There's Effie, who used to correspond regularly with a pal of mine until the G.P.O. people chipped in and forbade it on the ground that her letters scorched holes in the mail-bags. There's Connie, who fairly electrified the young bloods when she came on with a copper can in the second act of *Sweet Nancy,* and asked "Hot water, sir?" quite inimitably, and whom Sir Charles Muckross would have married in spite of his family, but for the persistency with which Effie's fool of a grey parrot kept on shouting one evening, "No, Georgie, not to-night!" Finally there's the dark one whose name I can't remember, but she's particularly hunky-perdoodlum, has Spanish blood in her veins—oh, I rubbed it into them until their only trouble was that they couldn't

bribe the captain of the boat to send the girls a Marconi to get busy with their curling-tongs and turn up at the ferry to meet us.

Thursday, Sept. 4th.—Dinard. Déjeuner'd on arrival at the Hotel Steak and Vedge—no, no, Chateaubriand—where Billie and Dickie sate and sipped the liqueurs which add so much to autumn's rich content, whilst I went in search of the birds. Discovered them at a small hotel by the Casino, and introduced myself—no blistering task in a place where you meet a little sideline in the surf at noon, and call on it at its hotel not more than twenty minutes later; but they're no sparkling revelations. So far do they fall short of my word-pictures painted aboard the boat, that I am fain to invent, on my way back to the Steak and Vedge, dramatic endings for the fabled Effie, for Connie from dreamland, for the dark 'un. She that needed the asbestos notepaper, I announce, purchased a 200 franc robe-de-nuit, renovated her visiting cards with benzine, and returned to England yesterday, her solicitor having called her attention to the fact that the last of her debts was barred by the statute of limitations on the 30th ult.; Connie had been sandbagged in error by a near-sighted French gentleman, who had since taken advantage of the low rates between Havre and New York to start for America on the day fixed for his marriage with his landlord's daughter; the dark 'un with the tar in her system had just entered a convent after secretly wedding an assistant-something in the Niger Protectorate, who had imprudently disembarked among a wrong tribe, and been eaten on his honeymoon. The gorged but affable indifference with which these details are received by Billie and Dickie is heightened rather than dispelled when I escort them to call on the blondines, and I begin to regret that in a febrile, ebullient moment I suggested that their ancient and moustached landlady—obviously also the Perpetual Lady President of the Norman Branch of the Anti-Savon and Water Society—might hold

herself in readiness for a little dinner for six at sunset. The more so since Heine's dictum that rich men are so unhappy that they need benevolent institutions to mitigate their misery, breeds no false joy in the breast of the Bucklersburyite in Dinard with only one-and-eight and a feeding appointment with a tall, blonde kid, with whom he has already exchanged a labial kiss, though assured by her that if her "people" ever suspected that she done such they would feel as sore as proselytes to Judaism about it.

The Same, 9 P.M.—Two hours have passed since we should have called and fed the canaries; meantime Billie Bunn has been outed by a *bouillabaise* that looked like Westgate at low water, and smelt stronger than a pearl-fishing lugger, and Dickie Scales has not been sober since 3.15. Some philosophy there is which holds that except to give an order, the greatest sin is to execute it; I do devoutly trust that Mère Jeanniot, the bearded *hostesse*, is a practical disciple of this creed; but what of my little prize pansy, Irene Treadwater? My brain works luminously enough till the wronged Irene and the misery of my one-and-eight enter it. How mutable a thing is man! He starteth, bent on opening a bale of Roman orgies on the noble lines laid down by Petronius Arbiter; he windeth up on streaky bacon, fried on a shovel in a cabmen's shelter! I should have known by now, I must tell Irene, with simulated chafing, that Cupid could not operate in a crowd; I must make it my personal business to see that she gets the leading part in one of the best of the coming provincial pantomimes: I must send her a real Norfolk turkey, also a motor car, for Christmas. Heartily sick of the whole business, yet anxious to get out of it as politely as possible, I leave my feeble friends and start for the abode of offended beauty.

Much Later.—I am back from their hotel. The birds had risen, in mastodonic wrath, and gone, but — Mère Jeanniot was there. My monstrous "might-have-waited"

bluff—femininity in its most fatuous phase—she fathomed at a glance, and conspuez'd (and worse'd) me as heartily as though I had been the town liar. Much that she said outdistanced my Ollendorf, but her text, I gathered from a phrase here and there, was that axiomatic dictum of the incensed fair, "I like a man to be a man"; whereupon, angered but always a gentleman, I shouted, with great restraint, "Shut up, *sale bête!* I am an Englishman, and Englishmen perform their promises!" "Poo-poo! poo-poo!" snarled the hag, with considerable sarcasm; "if so that be, where then are your friends, the other Englishmen?" Countered, I wavered for an instant, then, reckless in my desperation, I fired the temporal and banal lie, "Not a bit of it: *they* were no Englishmen!" Momentarily her parchment brows were knit, her bristling eyebrows raised. "Not Engleeshmen?" cried she, "pray what then were they?" "AMERICANS!" I cried, with happy inspiration, and for a few minutes the ogress's revengeful dial relaxed, and my only fear was that she would embrace me. But her puzzled look gave way at length: the shadows gathered again, and she cried, "*A bas, monteur! Non, non*, deceive am I not thus to be! For did not *l'homme Américain* visite Mademoiselle Iréne but yesterday, and was not he as is your *chapeau*, black—*très*, black? *Decidement*, *jeune homme*, *vous voulez*——." But I fled; moreover, I leave this mill to-morrow, grist or no grist. Dickie Scales is pulling round, and sends to say——

But here the entry ends abruptly.

Pessimists of the smart set are shaking their heads with ill-concealed mirth over Lady Hilda Chinewood's diminishing prospects of ever getting a decree *nisi*, a speculation into which she has already heroically socked about three thousand

pounds of her winnings since Goodwood, with little prospect, so far, of securing any return. For Lord Percy continues to lead a blameless life in the Bloomsbury garret to which Hilda's dole of thirty shillings a week confines him, despite the promise, wrung from him with many tears and threats, to be guilty of the technical "misconduct" which the law insists upon. With no assets save two pairs of patent-leather boots ready to be sent to be soled and heeled, he sits and smokes cigarettes all day, carelessly, unconsciously forcing upon poor Hilda the conviction that worldly happiness is a wild singing-bird which may not be caught and tamed. He certainly refrains, with the gentlemanly consideration of our common forefather, Adam, from attacking the previous character of the lady, but he has already jotted down in lead-pencil on the back of the citation the seven separate grounds of justification which he intends to plead in defence of his having married her. And they are:—

1. The weather at the time was beastly cold and uncongenial.
2. The roads were confoundedly sloppy.
3. Respondent could not afford two guineas a day for a cab; and
4. Respondent's walking boots admitted water in large quantities.

5. Respondent's chest was weak, and his doctor had ordered him "generous living."
6. Respondent was unable to obtain same, he having signally failed to get his paper done, even with the endorsements of "A. de Rothschild," "W. W. Astor," and "A. Carnegie," though he has since been informed that poor dear old Sam recognised the shade of ink in use at the "Blue Posts."
7. Process-servers had at the instance of (1) Messrs Bellamy Brothers; (2) Messrs Warren and Craik; (3) Messrs Justerini and Brooks, already penetrated to respondent's bedroom.

Lady Hilda, whose ineradicable habit of making love to every man she meets has turned out such particularly sour pickles on her, fatuously imagined that a woman who could hold her own with the bookmakers upon a racecourse would be more than a match for a lazy, feminine, Carlylean boy who falls asleep directly after dinner whenever he has been out in the fresh air during the afternoon, and she took him against everyone's advice. At Lincoln they were closer than onions on a string; but between the Grand National and the Guineas', her infatuation waned to comparative boredom, and, by Epsom, boredom had given way to positive loathing. At Ascot

he proved a hopelessly out-of-date dervish; and she brought him to the London Cup at Alexandra Park only because she had lately discovered a particularly smart cabman, called "Mint-sauce Fred," on the Wilton Road rank, and the man seemed inclined to get too pally. But the climax came at Goodwood, where Hilda had looked forward to a very big week, not only because tips to servants are expected to be lavish, but by reason of the subsequent draining month's "rest," in which nerves and glands and organs and muscles have to be renewed, while one is not winning a single steever.

The mid-day sun had spurred back the morning haze peculiar to the Southdowns, as Hilda and her marital incubus drove up the hill to Goodwood, from where Lavant lay buried in the quiet bosom of the woods. To any woman whose cheval-glass had spoken as eloquently on the subject of white serge as Hilda's had done, it should have been a day, if not of triumph, still of heavenly peace; yet the rapturous song of the lark and the happy droning of the bees only served to accentuate the misery of her merciless matrimonial mistake and dangle it before her eyes. It was maddening only to think of what she must endure during the next four days with the highly-necessary bookmakers on the one hand and the utterly unprofitable mature male suckling on the other. When the carriage

drew up at the wicket-gate, Hilda was at boiling point, and, turning to the right and leading the way into the plantation of elms and beeches, beneath the boughs of which full half a thousand powdered lackeys unpacked huge hampers of damask napery and shimmering glass and glistening silver, she cried aloud with withering scorn to the lord and master she despised :

"Now, dog, which tree will you sit under while I go and get you your living?"

Stung to the quick, whatever that may be, Percy, like Cambronne, hissed but a single word ; the next instant strong but servile hands were hauling him out of the wreck of the Duke of Ravensbury's cold collation, and five score of astonished onlookers realised that if a hand only does take $5\frac{3}{4}$ in white suéde gloves, it is astounding how hard and how straight it can hit. By what subterfuge he, being practically penniless, contrived to return to town is not known, but as he was last seen entering a small calico tent on which was legibly inscribed "ACCOMMODATION," it is reasonable to assume that he had recourse to these nomadic, but extremely convenient, financiers of the racecourse for the purpose of raising upon his gun-metal watch a small sum sufficient to pay his railway fare to London ; meanwhile, as "language" is constructive "cruelty" in the eye of the law,

Hilda will probably pursue Percy on the first day when there is no racing, and hit him again.

But, speaking of nomads, what an extraordinary vogue the Bond Street fortune-tellers are enjoying! Clairvoyantes is, perhaps, the more acceptable term, though no two of the visionists acknowledge the same denomination nor pursue the same mystic methods. Thus, Madame Hagar, of Grafton Street, poises a crystal ball upon a flower vase, while Madame la Moravie, of Bruton Street, toys only with the subject's finger-tips. Again, Madame Belisardas Brown, of Clifford Street, psychometrises over a lady's glove, whereas Madame Teresona Topping, of Cork Street, her sister—(and many believers in the "blood-thicker-than-water" aphorism readily allow Belisardas and Teresona to be thicker than both put together)—has been known to call loudly for, and even detain, a gentleman's trousers. It is, after all, the observant and intelligent crossing-sweeper at the corner who crystallises all the clairvoyancy that has come under his notice into, "'Ere, it's this way: Laidy arrives in a bro'um—Interval o' two minnits—Toff drives up in an 'ansom. 'Cleer-voyancy' yer calls it? Well, I'm—tongue-tied!"

It was as late as half-past eight the other evening, when all the world was supposed to be at dinner, that Captain Throatlash, the gallant

society playwright who, should his country suddenly require his presence, would be quite prepared to tread the icy Steppes of Russia in his dress pumps, ascended Madame Hagar's little dark staircase in Grafton Street, and awaited with some impatience the arrival of Lady Constance Edenhall. Each wished, from perfectly innocent and dissimilar motives, no doubt, to consult the oracle; the Captain, possibly, because he had an appalling access of dramatic work to get through in which the present state of affairs in the Far East constituted a perpetual menace to his personal peace; Lady Constance, perhaps, because she feared to order a new evening frock before ascertaining if it be true that, according to all the bibles, vedams, and alcorans of the Rue de la Paix, the waist-line is shortly to vanish entirely. But Lady Constance was shockingly late; indeed it was not until 8.49 that the noble Captain, hearing the stairs squeak, arose quickly from his chair, and pulling open the door beheld—Lord Huntley Edenhall!

"Hullo, Reggie, old sportsman!" cried his lordship, genuinely surprised, "why, what the blazes attracts a chap like you to such a peep-show as this?"

"Fact is, dear lad," replied Reginald Throatlash, "my little woman left her—er—*umbrella* either here or elsewhere this morning and I called in on the off-chance of hearing of it.

Same time I'd have laid a million to one against meeting *you* here?"

"Yes — er — well," drawled Lord Huntley, wondering if the kid from Daly's could possibly have been such a silly little devil, after his most explicit instructions, as to go to the *other* Grafton Street in the wilds of Fitzroy Square; "it's a dam funny coincidence, don't ye know, but *my* little missis was here this morning, too, in order to—er—er, see if the—er, magic ball, could indicate the present whereabouts of her long lost —er, lucky pig—yes, yes, her *lucky pig*, and I just dropped in to inquire in what manner the —er, miraculous crystal had acquitted itself of the mandamus of confidence she had given it. But, of course, it's all tommy-rot, isn't it?"

"With all deference, I think *not*," replied Throatlash, with the impudent reassurance of one who has suddenly spotted the way out of the maze, "I may, indeed, tell you, quite soberly and seriously, that I not only believe in, but actually practice, these occult sciences, and I have already attained sufficient power in them to compel at will —mark me, Huntley, I say again, compel—the attendance of any living person within the salt boundaries of the British Isles. Let me give you a demonstration: name somebody?"

"G'wan! You don't mean it, surely?"

"Never was more in earnest in my life: come, name somebody?"

"Right oh, old sporty; take your pick—Hackenschmidt—Tolstoi—that little girl that keeps the humming-top stall at the Exhibition—the captain of the *Pinafore*—Marie Corelli—Sunny Jim——"

"Tut, tut!" ejaculated Throatlash, pettishly, "I did not invite you to play the fool."

"Nor did I invite you to take me for one, Throatlash, please remember *that!*" retaliated Lord Edenhall, hotly.

"I have done nothing of the kind. I shall proceed, as I said, to demonstrate——"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" cut in Edenhall. "You are talking as though you were the bird-cage-man at the music-halls. Is it intoxication or indigestion: drink or only a dressed-crab? Because——"

"It is neither, sir, neither!" shouted Throatlash, "I mean to make you admit——"

"Don't shout at me, sir," interposed Edenhall, imperiously. "Remember never to raise your voice to a gentleman unless your house is on fire."

"I ask your pardon," apologised Throatlash, with magnificent bitterness; then swallowing his choler with all the desperation of an emu taking down a football, he bowed like any shopwalker and humbly begged that, as a parting favour, his erstwhile friend would answer him one question—one only. Was the admirable Lady

Constance at present at home at Grosvenor Gardens?

"Not this evening," laughed Edenhall, with amused contempt.

"H'm. Is it too much of me to ask where she may be?" continued Throatlash, mildly, yet not without confidence.

"It's twice as much as you had permission to ask," replied Lord Percy, wearily, "but I don't mind gratifying your vulgar curiosity: Lady Constance is presiding over a Watercress Mission, at Battersea."

"IS she?" screamed Reginald Throatlash, his bloodshot eyes flashing their resentment as, throwing up his arms and becoming a human ikon, he executed a rapid series of cabalistic calisthenics as though he were drawing from the ceiling itself the invisible fishing-nets of Wynken, Blynken, and Nod. Then in dramatic tones he cried, "Approach, Constance Isobel Bobitwell Edenhall!" and before the echo of his voice had time to die away, or Mother Hagar could withdraw her affrighted countenance from between the curtains which masked the inner chamber, a familiar footfall sounded on the creaking stairs and—in strode the Lady Constance Edenhall!

"*Now*, sir," bellowed Throatlash, rushing up to the beautiful woman who stood, mute, pale and with dilated eyes, and grasping her chin before her wholly unaffected stupor should turn

to hysterics, "*now*, sir, what about your 'drink and dressed-crabs'; *now*, sir, what are the extreme odds that you offer about 'the birdcage-man at the music-halls,' eh?"

"Marvellous! Stupendous! I am whacked to the world!" exclaimed Lord Percy, extending his hand. "Old friend, I ask ten thousand pardons; if you have no better place to lunch at to-morrow, will you——"

"Softly, softly, do not wake her; we can talk of lunch some other time," said the magnanimous Throatlash. "Take her home quietly and hand her over to her maid, lest the shock affect her brain. Good-bye."

Ever of thee,

VIOLA D.

EPISTLE VI

EATON SQUARE, *Tuesday, Novr. 3rd.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

Though there mercifully exists for all who like yourself lack brains, the consolation of religion, you have too long denied yourself the diversion of consulting Mother Hagar, for the police called upon her yesterday; and all that is to be seen in her deserted room to-day is the ivy garland which she sometimes wore, smiling in pathetic significance from the dirty hearthstone upon which it fell when the rough-and-tumble started. When Hagar assumed her flame-coloured robe this morning it was, alas! her final assumption; the taking down of her raven locks, her antepenultimate take-down. None know definitely who "put her away"; probably her own recklessness, born of undreamt of success, was the chief cause. Her sugared impertinences went down well enough for a while, but she should have been more careful to master

the art of walking on eggs without breaking them before the gin began to tell on her. Quite likely is it that her dissolution was brought about through her foolishly promising some billowy-bosomed barmaid enjoyments and sensations which are dogmatically denied to the working-classes; or she may have carelessly given to some married woman being sued by her dress-makers, the address of a millionaire who had been three months dead and buried; or there is yet one other possibility:

I daresay you remember (for the sequel is too long to go into the preceding sentence) the celebrated cause of Smith *versus* Smith and Dounecastle, the reports of which caused more than one bursting society bud of three seasons ago to recant Rosetti and embrace the *Evening Standard?* Also how, as soon as a long-empanelled jury, that was fading visibly for want of fresh air and red meat with gravy, had recorded its verdict and, rising as one man, had warmly complimented Mr Smith on regaining his freedom from wedlock with a woman with whom marriage was so entirely superfluous, the simple old peer bigamously married Mrs Smith at a registry office, foolishly committing perjury for the purpose? Well, he has since become the father of two girl babies—at least, so their mother says, but you never can tell—and as a son and heir was more ardently to be desired and something

of the kind was daily imminent, he last week sought to ease his mind by consulting Madame Hagar.

Much that she told him—as, for instance, that he would go to the Empire and meet a tall "spade" girl who had been insulted by her landlady and was going to move round into Winchester Street as soon as she could afford it; that, in another large building, of Moorish architecture, he would speak to a "heart" girl with blue eyes, who would look ten years worse for wear than when he last saw her in '99, and she also would allude to money matters, being urgently pressed for a sufficient sum to bury her deceased mother, to send her invalid little sister on a sea voyage, and to replace eight pounds belonging to another girl which the slavey had stolen from the vase on the mantelpiece; finally, that while riding in a public, white conveyance towards an *al fresco* entertainment with military bands and boats, he would pinch the knee of a perfect stranger and ultimately undertake a journey with her—was doubtless true, but highly irrelevant; it is the nature of necromancers, however, to prevaricate. Eventually she discerned within the crystal a fleeting current event, and cried:

"Yes, yes! All is over—thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen; the gods on high Olympus have once more frosted you from head to foot—

seventeen, eighteen, nineteen; it is another girl!"

"Too bad to be true! Too bad to be true!" gasped the peer, with a dreadfully dished look in his eyes as he collapsed into a curule chair made out of a beer-stand. "For heaven's sake have another look, missis?"

In mute obedience, the harridan burnished the crystal globe with her flannel sleeve and peered into it again, but she only shook her head dolefully. Then did a none too opulent son of a marquis, whose future seemed to consist mainly in populating the burlesque stage of 1922, steer straight for his club, there to wallow in old brandy as only one can whose simple faith in all mankind has been mercilessly arm-locked and thrown clear off the mat.

Judge, then, of the Earl's great joy next morning when the club servant who restored him to consciousness with prussic acid, showed him in the *Times* the announcement of the birth of a son! Imagine also the righteous ire, unequalled even by that of the pious, but somewhat deaf, old lady who threw a water-bottle at Nansen for speaking jokingly of the Equator, with which he started out for Grafton Street to rate the specious charlatan who had clumsily condemned him for four-and-twenty hours to alcohol and blank despair! Nor would the obstinate old thing admit that she was miffed.

Being without a servant, she said, her globes had not been properly polished that morning, and, the crystal becoming somewhat finger-marked and mottled, must account for her making one or two trifling miscues. It is not surprising if at boiling point old Dounecastle petitioned the police to blue-pencil Hagar vigorously.

But necromancy is not the new fad you think it, indeed, I have wondered for years how a sensible old gentleman like Victor Hugo, the greatest lyrical poet that France has seen (though some of the more stiff-necked of the Immortals never could forgive his singing "I'm living with mother now" at one of their banquets, and then excusing himself on the ground that the girl looked old enough to be, anyway), ever could have been a wizard's dupe. But it now transpires that he was a mere tool in the hands of the fascinating Comtesse de Camembert, who, detecting in him unmistakable signs of fatty degeneration of the cerebrator, got him at the *planchette*, and, between the Comte, her husband (compelled by his wife to wear a galvanic belt, and wrathfully attributing it to the poet's recommendation) pulling in front, and herself shoving behind, they had poor Victor at logger-heads with his dearest friends nearly all of the time. The charming Comtesse, of whom contemporary writers speak as having been "all

there and full measure," and whom the jealous Comte would probably have divorced had she not been the only woman in Paris who understood how to cut his corns properly, obtained such complete control over the cheery old poet that, whenever he received his quarterly envelope from his publisher, his only way of reserving it for his own use was to bury it behind the shrubbery, or leave it in his locker at the Turkish Bath. Otherwise the delightful lady, whose great-grandfather (more to the shame of her great-grandmother) was of royal blood, thought nothing of sending to the Rue de la Paix for a new lilac *Samedi-à-Lundi* turn-out, and then crying scornfully to Victor, as she shoved Virot's bill under his nose, "Have you got the sand to endorse that?" Nine times out of ten he did so, for the Comtesse, tall and slender as a young poplar, was an imposing figure, when well frocked, for a struggling man of letters to be seen about with after the bright-lights had dawned and cab fares were doubled; moreover, the couple had an amiable and economical understanding between themselves by which she invariably chalked up their little dinner at Paillard's to her husband, while Hugo's own visiting-card was always good for two fauteuils at any of the houses where they were not playing to over much money.

All this was long, long ago, dear, yet many

persons believe to this day in the *planchette* as a means of increasing the value of handwriting from a scientific standpoint; indeed, only last July young Monty Clondalkin (who got his troop at Hounslow after heroically suppressing a civilian riot, caused by an electric car conductor's refusal to allow an elderly native lady to ride as far as Twickenham, without paying full fare for a hive of live bees which she was carrying in her lap; the man contending that the hive should have occupied a seat, even if the bees had been left to select their own seats, or stand; but who, with countervailing misfortune, had to retire on half pay after being dangerously hit in the antipodes of his face by a paleozoic boulder from a jingal during the firing of a *feu de joie* by our allies at Thibet) was telling us at dinner one night of a very striking manifestation which he himself had witnessed. Knowing that he could catch nothing which he hadn't had about twice already, he boldly visited in a one-roomed cellar somewhere off the Euston Road, a certain Madame Ingomar, and, having straddled the ante, asked how to gain the lasting affection of the girl he loved and was to meet at Henley. The reply from the other world, via *planchette*, ran: "Win a million on Egyptian Beauty at Alexandra Park, and let her look at it"; and, though he had to lay eight millions to one *on*, dear, he brought it off!

This so impressed me with the virtues of the little board that, in the week before Goodwood, being sick of the sweet sisterhood which sticks to the Plantation, and yet needing the golden pinions with which to fly to the Ring, I hunted up dear old Phyllis Waring, who has made it up with Eustace, and is living in Knightsbridge in a delightful flat whose back windows overlook the Park, and begged her to get a *planchette* between us. Neither she nor I had the faintest notion where such things were sold, but after much searching, Phyllis found one in a small *bric-à-brac* shop in that queer neighbourhood which lies between the Royalty and Palace theatres, where Madonna-like ladies, attired chiefly in white tarlatan chemisettes, peep out of upper windows, and where black bearded men loll about the doorways of little pink and gold restaurants as though perpetually waiting for something to happen. Did not the Reverend Somebody, of the Church and Stage Guild, once have a chapel here in which the choristers appeared in tights? I fancy so.

Anyhow, Phyllis no sooner got it home than she summoned me to inspect it—a small wooden disc, dear, resembling nothing so much as an artist's palette. For an alleged novelty, it struck me as being rather soiled and dusty, but Phyllis assured me that we had the veritable thing;

that the ancients knew it well, the two best remembered apothegms of Terence being "You can always make a market with a bear *planchette*," and *Actum ne agas*, or, "Don't overdo it." Upon a small table placed in the centre of the room, Phyllis deposited the little board and switched off the electric light. For several minutes an awful and oppressive stillness reigned, broken only by a faint, half-stifled feminine voice exclaiming, "You *will* marry me, won't you?" which Phyllis said came from the Park at the back, and was no part of the séance whatever. Slowly, very slowly, the moments dragged along; then presently there came a slight sound as of a penholder tapping on a pill box, and Phyllis said, hoarsely and in sepulchral tones:

"The spirit of Madame Rachel asks the loan of an ear. She might as well bowl her hoop without wasting our time, I think; what with electric rollers and frown plasters we've got her ticketed as a mummy?"

I nodded assent, and many more moments of silence elapsed, followed by a grating noise as of the run down of a musical box.

"According to the old woman at the shop," said Phyllis, "the spirits notify that it's up to us to tilt back to them."

"Do they take this for a jackpot?" I asked, quite inoffensively.

"Never mind what they take it for," snapped

Phyllis, "let us get them to give us an option in something on the Stock Exchange that is going to go a bit higher."

"Oh, fiddles to *that!*" said I, having no more desire to know anything of the kind than How-to-tell-the-gas-meter, illustrated by diagrams. "Rather get them to slip us the winner of the Steward's Cup?"

Sullenly, Phyllis amended her pleadings and submitted my question. In about five minutes, during which period the low plumbean purring of a marking-pencil was distinctly audible, there came the click which denotes the termination of a message, and Phyllis, snatching up the prize, carried it out into the light. Bristling with joyous anticipation, I followed, but only in time to hear her swear and see her smash the wooden thing across her knee and pitch it out of the window on to the moonlight prowlers in the Park.

"You were quite right about that dust, Vi," she said, sourly. "I have been lumbered on to a fake that was timed to strike seventeen years ago. The thing napped 'Crafton, win and shop!'"

Did I tell you, I wonder, in my last how those awful people, the Invernairne's, had fallen out again? Everyone is saying how worn and rundown she is beginning to look, and how much better it would be if only she could go away for a time. I don't mean to one of those dreadful

places where seemingly intelligent old gentlemen caterwaul and hide themselves in mignonette beds, and perfectly blameless old ladies disrobe suddenly at the dinner-table and weep copiously into the soup tureen, because they are not as pure and unsullied as new milk-cans, but to some nerve-restoring retreat where she could recuperate without having strangers stare holes in her. Poor Maisie! when she married the middle-aged Invernairne she was quite one of the wits of the smart set, and, if not exactly a belle of letters herself, she had received many and many a bushel from the beaux of literature, principally respecting appointments. Never an ardent advocate of the tied-house system, her cultured soul and innate good taste had rebelled against the constant and vulgar propinquity of matrimony, which she had endeavoured to vary by bolting on seven different occasions with men who were all that could be desired, socially. Her prosaic husband had followed her up on each occasion, however, and, begging her to give marriage a fair and dispassionate trial, had brought her back again and again, until her once pellucid spirit became crushed and broken, and she was no more fun to talk to than a Trappist.

Quite lately she imported from Lausanne a tall, dark Swiss maid who had repented of some early rashness, and vowed that her future life should be one unending struggle against the

promptings of nature. Gowned demurely in some simple clinging material which, as the *Family Herald* says, accentuated rather than hid her graceful outline, Fanchon flitted lightly and swiftly up and down the Invernairne staircases, save when the Earl detained her on a landing to tell her how nicely her new bodice fitted her.

One fine morning at breakfast, the Earl remarked that as his physicians and also his bankers had ordered him to visit a lumber camp in Norway, he feared that he might not be back until the following day, and he felt it was an excellent opportunity, he said, for Maisie to go to bed at the same hour as the canaries, and have a real good rest. Then he called loudly to his man not to forget to pack his snowshoes, his caribou gun, plenty of ground bait for the trout, and disinfectants for the riper ryper, and took his departure. That selfsame night, in about the middle watch, poor Maisie, sleeping lightly and nervously, fancied that she heard the stairs creak in a guilty way, and tremblingly got up. Slipping into a tight-fitting lace dressing-gown with three deep flounces shooting boldly from below the knees, she crept out upon the stairs in time to see a familiar form, plainly silhouetted in the moonlight, just one flight above her, and still climbing. Invernairne had clandestinely returned!

Though Maisie entertained no Victorian views regarding the fidelity of husbands, and even knew that in clubland several men who had lately allowed their hearts to be true to their Polls, had been expelled on the ground that their conduct was unbecoming gentlemen, the situation seemed so promising of advantage to herself that she instinctively followed the figure, keeping close to the wall, where stairs are quietest. Precisely at the point anticipated, the spectral Invernairne crossed a landing and laid his hand softly upon the knob of the long suspected door. As the handle slowly turned and the door, opening inwards, suffered a strong shaft of light from a cheerful, crackling fire to cleave the darkness—Maisie, poor, impulsive fool, shouted imperiously, "STOP!"

Invernairne, with man's inborn craft, stopped instantly, and accurately grasping the situation, acted without a moment's pause. Stopping dead upon the threshold of the girl's room, he shouted into it angrily:

"How *dare* you burn my coals in this way, you abandoned hussy? Douse that fire with your water-jug immediately, and prepare yourself for a bitter reckoning to-morrow!"

Then, turning back towards the stairs, he gasped the old Criterion gag, "My wife!"

"And pray what brings you here to-night?" Maisie asked, by this time realising how com-

pletely she had sacrificed the position to her own impetuosity.

"Economy, my love, sheer economy," replied the ready liar. "Found, when I got to Hull, that the Wilsons owned the boats and the fare was seven pounds. Far better spend the seven pounds on dear Maisie, thought I, and write to the Wilsons to send me a complimentary pass—perpetual free pass, in fact—besides, the Wilsons would never speak to me again if they ever heard of such a thing as my paying to travel by their line—preposterous! Back then I came—worn, weary, jaded, but self-satisfied—only to behold, on approaching the beloved goal, the unmistakable reflection in the clouds of a huge fire somewhere in my own dwelling. What great good fortune that I had turned back! How Providence provides! I adopted my old trapper tactics—stalking stealthily—from crest to crest—birchbark and woodcraft—aha! And blest if that Swiss hoyden of yours hadn't got a fire half way up her chimney, madam, and Cockerell's charging me thirty-five shillings a ton! Out of this house she goes to-morrow morning, mark that!"

"May the Lord have mercy on your miserable soul!" was all that Lady Invernairne could say as, trembling with suppressed agitation, she motioned him to the spare room and, a moment later, locked him in. And now the very natural

question is What, oh What, will the Harvest be?

I really cannot conclude without thanking you for the hearty laugh you gave me by your humorous inquiry about my "going to the Lord Mayor's Show" next Wednesday. You have evidently not forgotten, dear soul, that the feeblest manifestation of the undying spirit of Thackeray's Jenkins never fails to move me to laughter; but really I prefer to leave to you and your sort the fragrance of the asphalte and the watermen's garments, also the fat and greasy citizens in furs and chains. Fortunately, like the pigs in France which have, since Villon dreamt he was a swine rooting in the streets of Paris, had to keep outside the fortifications, these dear old civic creatures are, like the pigs, only brought into these regions to be bled; and I will wager a fiver that when the worthy alderman who assisted Féo at her flower stall at the last bazaar is taken round to Dover Street to-morrow, he will bow to my opinion that she has not spent the last three weeks getting pinned up in fitting-rooms for nothing!

Thine

VIOLA.

EPISTLE VII

THE LADIES' RAG, *December 3rd.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

All day long there has been ringing in my ears the immortal observation of the extremely fastidious and highly cultured damsel who remarked, you may remember, as she finished her first riding-lesson, "M'yes, the sensation is agreeable enough, but the motion is highly ridiculous," for my morning mail is mainly of those who are hunting the fox. Housed in the Honourable Winnie Brandon's admirable hunting box—the adjective is justified by her many excellent domestic rules, one of which, for instance, is to have a loud gong sounded in the hall at ten minutes to six each morning, so that when the servants bring up the cups of tea at six precisely, they may find the guests all in their proper rooms and sound asleep—at Melton, are some of the smartest people that ever publicly strained at the most insignificant gnats and

privately swallowed the most enormous camels. Not the least noteworthy among her guests is Lady Sheila Crampton, who since she got to learn the truth about her husband's audacious acquaintance with the Honourable Win, has assiduously made an intimate friend of her, though whether with a view to cut out in her own spouse's affections the beautiful Diana, or to effect an economy by the cheaper and easier method of watching *one* person instead of paying detectives to keep an unflagging look-out on *two*, has not yet been decided in eggshell china circles. Winnie is, to say the least, dreadfully "raw" over the business, though less so, in another sense, than Sheila, who, being unaccustomed to so much occupancy of the saddle, metaphorically moans in mauve ink for a recipe for restoring lost leather. If hot and then cold water, and tincture of myrrh, with a final top-dressing of zinc ointment, will not toughen her cuticle like a sjambok, then has Bermondsey lost her bearings and the fabled jolly tanner his art; but what of the lovers meanwhile? Finding it no longer necessary to outdistance the poor, unpractised lady and her equally bothered horse—"a-blowin' like a pair o' June brides," as the first said to the second whip—they may flirt along side by side to the great amusement of the field and the making of much new history.

And Melton has not yet satisfied itself as to

what it was that caused the Honourable Winnie to miss her hunting for the first five weeks of last season, though, with truly ingrowing nerve, it has sought for a whole year to pry open the inscrutable. All it knows is that it saw on one Autumn evening of twelve months ago, a groom with a petrified countenance ride out from the stables of Brandon Towers and through the town, to return, more than an hour later, with the eccentric Dr Moxon from Swanzey Constable.

Though a bunch of five local practitioners, striving to fill out a six-day week, mutely resented the intrusion, old Dr Moxon continued to ride into Melton every afternoon thereafter on the fifteen-year-old pony which was almost beyond its office. With the second week he started sporting a white vest, and a neighbouring parson with elderly daughters thought seriously of asking him to dinner; but none were quite bold enough to risk a throw-down, and the mystery of Brandon Towers remained unsolved.

Five weeks later, as the philosophic old doctor was making a hearty breakfast off a cold grouse which was dead enough to call for disinfectants, a servant announced Lord Willoughby de Sambre, and was in fact followed into the little dining-room by that breezy nobleman.

"Beg a thousand pardons for disturbin' you with the nosebag on, sir," said the peer, whose lachrymal glands indicated early transactions

with brandy and soda, "but I've called to thank you very heartily for all you have done for Lady Brandon, and to ask you to accept this little cheque. Above all, I don't want it known what's been the matter with her; do you mind recording it in your books as small-pox? Thanks, awfully! There's one other little matter, sir. Lady Brandon—to whom I'm, ahem, closely related—tells me your old pony is none too efficient. Now, I'm putting on the rail to you a little red Daimler which will buzz you round and keep you more in touch with events. No—no thanks, you'll get it to-morrow; don't forget—small-pox!"

And Lord de Sambre vanished. Next day, a glistening little spark-waggon, as red as sealing-wax, arrived, and old Dr Moxon there and then christened it, lest he might forget his benefactor's last request, "VARIOLA," and wheeled it into his stable.

As he was in the act of recrossing his garden in the direction of his surgery, the elderly medico beheld a tall, military man with a frozen smile alight from the station fly and advance towards him, hat in hand.

"Ah, my dear Doctor Moxon," he cried, "this is lavender indeed for me! Pray accept this small cheque, miserably insufficient as it is, for all your goodness towards Lady Brandon, my—er, sister-in-law. It's like violating every principle of

gratitude from A to Z to ask a further favour of you, but *do* you mind bein' mum—absolutely G.H.!—as to the exact nature of Lady B.'s indisposition? Could you refer to it as—say bile or green cussedness of some sort? She is awfully sick, by the way, at your having to cover the Cosmos on a perambulating organism too far gone to stand doping, and I'm sending you—oh, fie, fie, I shall take no denials!—a little Panhard that'll skim round the corners like the pictures on the screen. Not a word, not a word; it'll be here to-morrow; but remember—headachy sickness an' all that caper!"

Long after the stranger had taken his departure, the good old doctor in his temporary perplexity scratched the shining pate which offended Nature had tonsured at 69 to resent the overwearing of the halo in all weathers, and gazed at the cheque which still lay where it had fallen on the floor. He could salve his conscience, he reflected, by destroying the superfluous draft; but with the entrancing little green *tonneau* which a railway rustic delivered at the door next morning, it was entirely different. So winsome was the diminutive car, with its fluted varnished bonnet, its bravely burnished lamps, and its intricate and interesting steel gear, that no soul only lately converted to automobilism could possibly have returned it—even had not the princely donor countered even that feasibility by

scrupulously concealing his identity. So Doctor Moxon accepted the situation with the sigh of a philosopher, and, naming the green car "CHLOROSIS" as if by a happy inspiration, he strolled out into the quiet churchyard to try and forget all about the beautiful Lady Brandon among the quaint obituary puffs of the old tombstones.

Returning, much relieved, he was surprised to find a genial elderly gentleman with a ripston-pippin face and silk-lined clothes, sitting demurely in the cottage surgery and earnestly endeavouring to become deeply interested in Burckhardt's *Atlas of Electric Cystoscopy*.

"Doctor Moxon, I presume?" said this bland person, laying Burckhardt aside as the old physician entered; and, receiving an affirmative nod, continued: "Of course, my dear sir, you haven't the faintest notion as to who I may be, but it will suffice for me to tell you that I was—er, eh—yes, yes, Lady Brandon's former ward in Chancery—eh, no—tut, tut, how very foolish!—I mean, of course, that she was *mine*—egad, bless her heart, yes!—and—er, in that case, you will readily understand how deeply grateful I must feel towards the Galenian genius to whom she probably owes life itself to-day. Meantime, my dear Doctor Moxon, there are one or two reasons—purely private and family reasons—why the world at large should remain in ignorance of the

precise nature of Lady Brandon's indisposition, and I feel sure that you will respect them—aye, that you will even waive personal veracity as well as professional etiquette to oblige a very delightful and charming woman, and—er, eh—be good enough to inform the curious that she has simply been suffering with a very aggravated attack of —er, toothache!"

"Really, sir——"

"Pray don't interrupt me, doctor!" cried the pippin, warming with enthusiasm; "but it occurred to dear Lady Brandon in all her dental agony—ha-ha, ho-ho!—that your slight, but not inconsiderable, delay in responding to her summons was solely attributable to the poverty of your horseflesh. Now, my dear sir, you must'nt be offended at what I am about to say, but what were formerly luxuries for the few are now necessities for the many, and what a country doctor surely needs is a swift and reliable motor-car. It fortunately happens——"

"Inexplicable! Do you know, sir——"

"Pray allow me to finish—more especially since dear Lady Brandon seems to have so accurately divined your necessities. It fortunately happens that, being seldom out of town, I have recently given up my 12 h.p. De Dion world-beater and gone in for a landaulette; but her ladyship no sooner mentioned your old pony than I sent the De Dion to Barker's, who have

refitted it with a delightful custard-coloured brougham body precisely in Lord Lonsdale's style, and therefore just the very thing to carry you about a hunting country. It should be here this very evening, and if you will do me the honour to accept——Good gracious, the poor gentleman is overcome! Clearly the tension of the past five weeks has been too much for him. Hi, there—without; come to your master's assistance, somebody! Here, you, my good woman, apply the usual restoratives and—and I will see him at some other time!"

Like the gentle, medicinal soul that she was, possessing an infallible cupboard-remedy for everything between moths and malaria, the doctor's housekeeper got the old boy round again by the evening and sent him to the "Lamb" to stand round at bottle pool as fit as hands could get him, but he wandered up to the station instead and got there just in time to see the yellow De Dion being unloaded from a trolley, under the personal supervision of the husky old stationmaster who had not taken a day off duty in thirty-four years. Privileged by long acquaintance, this venerable youth got off one or two satirical cracks about cert'in people a-goin' ahead lately, and it allus was them as had it as pleaded poverty the loudest—neither of which vulgar personalities would have made the least impression on the amiable healer had not

the man in blue and braid wound up with, "An' only this afternoon, when the 4.57 stopped here, His Grace the Duke o' Croxton himself calls me to the carriage-door to ask me whether you calls your house 'Oakham Lodge' or 'Oakham Villa,' as he wants to write to yer to go and see him!"

The mere idea that a live Duke was pining for an audience with him caused Austin Moxon to stop growing for several minutes. He had no reason whatever to suspect that the Duke was even aware of his presence on earth, and he thought it equally unlikely that his Grace had, after a quarter of a century, discovered who it was that, for sheer sports sake had kept chi-iking "Lou-der!" during the ducal effort at the local political meeting in '79. Musing on these things and the gratifying fact that the stationmaster was too hopelessly a fool to be guilty of a joke on any subject, Austin Moxon sought counsel in the excellent old brown brandy at the "Lamb"; though with grateful memories of his pippin-faced visitor and his agitated entreaties, he went not to bed until he had seen the yellow "toothache" car housed safely in his stables and had bestowed upon it the fitting cognomen "ODONTALGIA."

. . . . . .

"I ask your Grace to pardon my unpunctu-

ality," stammered the overwhelmed doctor, on being shown, two days later, into the cream and gold library at Croxton Castle at exactly three minutes after the hour named in the Duke's summons, "but a slight accident detained me on the way. I earnestly hope that my lateness has caused no inconvenience?"

"It has so seriously disturbed my arrangements, not to mention my peace of mind," replied the Duke, pleasantly, "that I had not yet noticed it. But I hope that it *was* but a slight accident, doctor?"

"So colourless and conventional an affair, your Grace," Doctor Moxon hastened to say, "that—er—that it is difficult, if not impossible, for me to imagine its parallel, I assure you."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Duke, impressed by this comprehensive disavowal, "then pray what may it have been?"

"My horse put his foot into a rabbit-hole, fell, broke his neck, and died upon the spot, sir," blurted the doctor.

No sooner did he hear his own words than Dr Moxon realised the absurdity, the incongruity of his previous denial; but he was wholly unprepared for the remarkable effect which they produced upon the Duke. That illustrious person twisted his body so suddenly in his chair that his *pince-nez* fell to the floor, and, staring excitedly at the doctor with an utterly incomprehensible

expression of delight tempered by solicitude, he cried:

"Splendid! Couldn't have been better! What a singularly opportune and fortunate circumstance!"

This was a poser! What could the Duke mean? Did he design to chide nonsensical servility by an assumption of supreme irony, or had his mental balance really been upset by such a juxtaposition of dissimilars coming from a presumably responsible medical man?

"Forgive my exuberance, doctor," continued the Duke, more seriously, "and be good enough to draw your chair a little more this way. That's it. Now, you were sent for the other day by a—ahem, a valued tenant of mine, whose horse had given her a rather bad fall in the hunting-field and bruised her pretty severely——"

"I have no recollection of the case whatever!" interposed Moxon, innocently enough.

"Probably not, sir, probably not," the Duke added, with a broad smile and a distinctly plebeian wink, "but as a gallant gentleman you will, I feel sure, permit my diagnosis to supersede your own. You would, I am firmly convinced, cheerfully die in defence of the austere morality, the impeccable reputation, the obdurate purity of any one of the adorable creatures who periodically grace these parts during the hunting season, and

in whose fair hands St Anthony himself would have been as potter's clay. We will, therefore, please, say it was a severe, uncompromising bruising which lately affected Lady Winifred Brandon——"

"Number four!" gasped Moxon beneath his breath.

"But that is not the point, which rather is that although, like the immortal Gilpin, you rode with speed—the best of which your grey dobbin, whose loss I formally deplore, was capable—there was necessarily far more delay than if you had driven over on a motor-car. This reflection, and a sense of gratitude to you for your care of my—er, my valued tenant—yes, yes, my valued tenant, impel me to ask you to accept as a little present, a very pretty four-cylinder Darracq, just come from Suresnes, which——"

But Dr Moxon had staggered to his feet, his brain reeling with the drawing of many psychological conclusions, and he moved in a dazed way and emitting choking noises towards the open French window. A few turns round the Italian garden served to revive him; but how could he go back? How could he ever face the Duke after making such an irrational exit? Thus absorbed, he crept through the quickset hedge, and took the route through the woods to his home, arriving with burrs in his hair and garter-snakes in the folds of his trousers. Next day

there arrived the bruise-blue Darracq, now known as "ECCHYMOSIS"; since when the overstocked doctor has assiduously advertised the machines on the thirteenth page of the *Telegraph* as duplicate wedding presents with all the familiar allurements—Sacrifice, Unused, Approval before Payment, etc.—and much against the advice of his prudent housekeeper, who sanguinely predicts a transference to London and a garage in Long Acre, if only Lady Winifred hunts from Melton for another season.

I am so pleased to hear, dear, that your sister Aenid's baby is going on so nicely, though, never even having had the sinister finger of suspicion directed at me, let alone possessed a baby of any kind, I have not even a passing notion of what they should endure and what escape before appearing in public. Reports of cases presenting specially interesting symptoms usually are concealed by publication in the "Mother's Corner" of the *Kennel Gazette*, I believe; the mothers themselves being mysteriously counselled with regard to their dietetical errors in feeding their offspring, in such cryptic sentences as "Stop the B.F. diet and report in a month," or, "Give baby the shredded pin-feathers of a young onion before retiring, and lie her on her other side." Nor can I express an opinion as to whether your sister's nurse's panacea for the pain in your sister's baby's stomach was good or otherwise, since, on

reference to the huge old book of pasted-in recipes for every ill allied to maternity, which Féo once conscientiously kept up, I find that the point was raised, but not settled, in the celebrated Salisbury Baby Claimant case some years ago. As you may or may not have read, a witness named Jane Lawrence deposed that after the birth of the child she gave her sister some weak brandy and water. She also gave the baby some butter and sugar (laughter). It was the usual custom, she said, to do so.

Mr Justice Hawkins asked Mr Jelf whether that was so.

Mr Jelf appealed to his learned friend, Mr Dickens, whether that was *not* so.

Mr Dickens had received no instructions upon the point; in fact, he protested that he knew nothing about it.

Thereupon Mr Justice Hawkins said that the case must clearly be adjourned till eleven o'clock on the following morning.

Immediately beneath this cutting there appears in pencil: "Gt. Eastern Handicap, Amandier, Missal, Royal Mask. Twelve ran"; not that any affinity could possibly exist between the two events.

Marshall has just brought to me an imperious command to join Lady Thursa Rosacre at Lowndes Square in twenty minutes' time to mote to Brighton, her husband, probably considering

his freedom cheap at the sacrifice, having lent her his car for the week on condition that she drives it herself. An atmosphere of steam is a daily necessity of life to the Rosacres; and I daresay you remember how, when the Zoological Society proposed to send its leading elephant on tour to help expenses, how Thursa drove straight off to the offices in Hanover Square, and offered to ride the dear pachyderm three times round Regent's Park on the Saturday afternoon before Ascot, attired as Lady Godiva—purely in the cause of charity, of course. She reckoned it would bring in, she said, enough money to keep the Zoo out of the hole for two hundred years at least, if, indeed, it didn't create such a stampede at the turnstiles that such points as Gloucester and Clarence Gates would be over a week burying their dead.

But motoring in December is too dishevelling, and the bud who has ridden fifty-two miles in the teeth of a dust-storm and held her life in her hands one-hundred-and-twenty-seven distinct times between Piccadilly and Pyecombe, makes about as effective an entrance into Brighton as the last stone-bruised idiot in the shopboys' annual walk. And while Reginald Rosacre is none too deft in handling his own car, one really needs, to ride beside Thursa, nerves equal to those of the racing gentleman who, on his way back from the Slough railway accident, shot

seventeen pigeons running in a £5 sweepstakes, but was partially paralysed and completely prostrated by shock when the railway company's doctor called on the following morning to ascertain the extent of his injuries. Why, was not it only in August last, dear, that she and he and the dandy chauffeur sustained their memorable breakdown on this very road? Did not they start out, on one of those gummy, thunder-laden evenings, when the ceaseless ambition for sleep is only thwarted by the pestiferous attentions of the insects which everywhere abound, and fiercely attack all unprotected flesh with their little spiked shoes, to run down to Brighton and empty their lives of everything but petrol until Doncaster? And what happened?

Along about the middle watches of that night, when only a white streak marked the road and the travellers were exchanging the luscious dews of Surrey for the first suggestions of the salt sea-fret of Sussex, that car, which was popularly supposed not to know what a hill was, even if you showed it one, gave three spits and a conquassative tremor and came to a sudden stop. All in vain did the dapper stoker key-up this and tighten that, and pour fresh bituminous drinks carefully over the thing's appalling thirst; to no effect did Lord Reginald Rosacre unload the astounding anthology of profanity which he had at great pains acquired from one of the most celebrated

of the three hundred million professors of the art in Asia ; as a vehicle of progression that car was 99 in 100 behind a crippled goat.

Through a hole in a hedge that hemmed about a redskin-flourball pasture, the two men pushed and butted the inoperative box of cylinders ; Thursa, with her skirts held knee-high to elude the agile and amatory potato-bug, looking on with an air of persecuted resignation. She was elegantly dressed, as all women whose beauty is due more to art than inheritance invariably are ; and Balzac's crude old line which, sterilised and disinfected, says that men love not the woman, but the woman's clothes, arose with unpleasant suggestiveness in Reginald's mind whenever he thought of going in search of succour, and leaving the chauffeur to look after Thursa. Equally impracticable did it seem to send forward Balzac's compatriot of the cigarette-fingers and the steering-wheel, since he spoke no language but his own ; so ultimately the fair, over-dressed child-wife had to be left at the mercy of the bugs with many misgivings, but definite instructions to sound a loud horn should danger seem impending.

Four miles and a quarter further on, there reposed in a Sleepy Hollow ten cottages, a baker's, a harness shop, and a Georgian inn ; but Reginald Rosacre died ten deaths in reaching it. The first streaks of dawn were coming from between

the quaint old sixteenth-century bungalows on Hogg's Hill and falling on his lordship's left cheek, all grimy and grey with dust, as he staggered up to the tavern's oaken door and rapped upon it with a long steel monkey-wrench. A horse and trap—no matter at what cost—would still get them into Brighton ere most folks were up.

"Oho, there! Within, within!" he cried, lambasting the brave ilexian door with his puny implement.

A window sash, immediately above his head, was raised noisily, and a red-faced, half-awakened man looked out and asked what the future torment was the matter.

"Say, have you any flys heah?" cried Lord Rosacre.

"Millions an' millions of 'em, damyer!" roared the irate innkeeper, really using a much coarser objurgation. "But we don't buy our fly-papers in the middle o' the gory night! Take that!"

And, catching up two huge flower-bowls, or something, in the liquid contents of which some such pungent stalks as those of mignonette or wallflower had been stagnating for a week or more, he drenched his unexpected visitors as freely and liberally as, in the wild old days on the Euphrates, the magnificent Lucius Verus did his guests when he emptied murrhine vases filled with nard upon their heads before being

carried up drunk to bed in a coverlet of camel-hair.

No, Marshall, say please that I have gone to Turkey to gather arum lilies.

Thine, dear,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE VIII

BUCKTHORN MANSE, SURREY, *January 6th.*

MY DEAREST PATRICIA,—

When you ingenuously asked in your refreshingly-conventional Yuletide rigmarole whether I duly suspended my stocking on Christmas Eve and, if so, what I got out of it, you were actuated more, I believe, by a vapid desire to appear "seasonable" than by a spirit of idle inquiry as to whether I had sensibly cloven the continuity of a ghastly practice; but in either case it cheers me greatly to be able to inform you that, though my shins are still covered with woven brown silk to a point that is defiant of criticism, I really *did* find it convenient to hang up my enamelled garters for a tenner, and, thanks to subsequent investments at the Buckthorn Park New Year's Hunt Meeting, that sum has been multiplied sevenfold. A hunt meeting *per se* would mean less than nothing to you, dear, but when one is staying, as I am, with the people

who are the breath in the nostrils of the whole thing, one becomes a part of the meeting itself and appreciates with a new perception the points which previously were unseen or unrecognised. Unlike such foxy fixtures as Ascot and Epsom and Goodwood, where the roguery of the owner is too often reflected in the reluctance of the racehorse, an atmosphere of probity and rectitude envelops the hunt meeting and inspires its votaries to pursue the same policy of frank, unbuckled integrity and veracious candour by which alone it sternly silences the ever-ready tongue of scandal. Not as in flat-racing, where all is whispered and inscrutable, there is no concealment here from first to last—from the titled stewards meeting in the lavatory regularly before each race to equitably arrange the rates of betting; the humane trainers giving their horses a refreshing bucket of water apiece before sending them to the starting-post; the returning jockey of the winner pulling up without dismounting at the paddock bar and taking three large, courage-giving drinks and a pork pie before going in to scale; and finally the principal bookmaker driving off the course in a dogcart behind the hot favourite who was so unfortunately left at the post in the opening event. To me the whole thing is completely bewitching, for though, in the absence of trains reserved exclusively for the use of "Club" members, one may have to travel

in the company of persons whose knowledge of attenuated English classics is limited and whose conversations, even when ostentatiously suppressed, are distinctly not anæmic, there is ample compensation to be had in the overheard narrative of the drinking of strong wines from reeking gourds, to say nothing of the conversational "pointers" which accompany it. How I should *love* to stay in the dining-room with the men to-night whence all (the petticoats) but I had fled, to, like a gramophone, repeat this memoir of my journey down:

"Did ye 'ear about Bill Willis an' Tom Reeder a-goin' to Plumpton, George?"

"Which Bill Willis d'ye mean, 'Arry; him as set the old woman on the fire at Doncaster?"

"No, no; not him. The Bill Willis what the doctor in the Sunday paper told to eat a raw inion at each meal—him as they used to call 'Ev'ry-Morn-I-Bring-Thee-Vi'lets'?"

"Oh, *him!* Why, what happened to 'em?"

"They set out about a week ago to carry on the noble work at Plumpton Steeplechases, an', as both felt as they could do with a bit of a change, they arranges to stop 'private' in Brighton, at a little case in Black Lion Street where Tom Reeder annually took his old woman every August. It's not by no means a fash'nable lodgin' for society ducks—in fact, as showin' that the lan'lady wasn't expectin' winter lodgers, Bill

and Tom found as she'd been snowballin' the lay-out, or in other words, stuffin' all the settin'-room furniture, with that chemical moth-stuff what looks like candles but hums like as if the gas was turned on. There was only one bedroom, too, but it had a brace o' kips in it as well as a big double wardrobe for to 'ang yer clothes in; in every respec' as good a place as a man need want, and all comin' at a figure that didn't compel ye to give the lan'lady the frozen face on the last day o' the meetin' unless things went *extra* kerteever. You follow me, George?"

"Abso-pleadin'-lutely, 'Arry. Well?"

"Well—but you know what Brighton is, George; the wettest part o' the glorious place lies north o' the beach, not south. You stroll along the front fully intendin' to give yer old liver a good washin' in Schilling's beautiful natural sel'zer water, an', before you're half way to the Metropole, you've done eight or ten splits, a pint o' stout along o' the oysters what you've 'ad at the little shop behind the Star an' Garter, so many gins-an'-bitters that yer stomach, originally humbugged into believin' it was a-goin' to have a square meal, refuses to take any further notice of 'em, a stray slosh o' bay rum where you got shaved in Ship Street, two or three drops o' that stuff as you took when the doctor told yer to do all as you could to be sick——"

"Ver-mooth."

"Aye, ver-mooth ; an' by the time you oughter be half way to the racecourse you're still a-lookin' for a conveyance round about Castle Square, an' a-gapin' to such an extent that street boys comes up to you an' offers to show yer the chemist's shop in East Street where they sells the infallible yawn drops. But there's one thing I *will* say for the Brighton atmosphere: you seem to pull yerself round again just as quick as you seemed to get oiled—consequently Bill Willis an' Tom Reeder spent a thoroughly enj'yable an' int'lectual week of it."

"I'm sure!"

"Any'ow, on the Saturday mornin' just about nine o'clock, Bill marches into the 'Swan' in Ship Street with his tongue a-feelin' like a ash-heap an' literally a-gaspin' for his mornin's mornin'. Now the 'Swan' in Ship Street is a sort of 'ome-from-'ome for families an' sportsmen visitin' Brighton, an' from goin' there so frequent like, both Bill an' Tom had come to know the manager. So, as Bill glides softly in, lookin' as if he'd just seen Hell in a nightmare, the manager wishes him good-mornin' an' asks him if he hadn't slep' well last night. 'Fact is, mister,' said Bill, 'I've only a hazy remembrance of 'ow I got to bed at all, an' it certainly wasn't till close on four this mornin' in any case. That gentleman-friend o' mine an' me had two other gents to dinner at our lodgin's—I dessay you remember we took

eight bottles o' Scotch away from here with us? —an' I must have had the devil's own luck at cards, for although I seemed to get whacked every time as I went the bundle, jiggered if I didn't wake up this mornin' with close on twelve quid in my kick—a state o' things that whistles aloud for a bottle o' the best. Give us yer wine list, an' set out one tumbler for yerself.' But the manager, though producin' the wine list, says he makes it a rule never to drink so early; besides he's jest had one; also it's the brewery traveller's day for comin' down, an' that'll mean another. So Bill Willis, with that glorious feelin' of affluence that comes from a well-lined kick—when one feels matey with all the world, an' seriously considers why he don't write to the brewery an' ask for special terms for a wholesale order—sings a bottle o' something extra sec at fourteen-an'-a-tanner, an' takes it from a half-pint tumbler. 'Drink 'earty, boy!' he says to himself aloud as he fills his second glass, an'—well, just as he said the words, in rushes Tom Reeder!"

"Just in time, eh?"

"No, a wee bit late. Tom's awfully hot-under-the-collar about something or other, for he no sooner sets eyes on Bill, than he bellers out, 'Gawdstroth, Bill, I've run half over Brighton to find yer!' 'Well, you should have took a fly,' says Vi'lets, bold with the booze;

'but what's the matter?' 'Matter enough!' shouts Tom, 'when you went to that ruddy wardrobe this mornin' you put on *my* trahsers!'"

It may not have been a very convincing *argumentum ad judicium* (as they said at Weatherby's when a certain racing countess wanted to register "Haste to the Wedding" as the name of a gelding) for one so well posted to have purchased before the eyes of all men a shilling card from a racecourse tipster, whose wardrobe would have precluded his obtaining employment at delivering coals, but I stood by the rails to listen to the engaging story of how he never failed to find the winner, but that it was his fearful thirst which seemed to keep him broke; how he should "be 'aving something *very* 'ot" for the last race, cabled straight to him by Slod Toan, who was at present schooling yearlings for President Roosevelt in the Phillypeanut Islands, on to which he wanted us to get our money into action quick, tear up our return briefs, and ride 'ome in an airship. Up to now, he continued, the Ring didn't even know that such an 'orse existed; but owner, trainer, and jockey had tried it to give two stone to Pretty Polly, and were surprised to find it even so much better than *that*, that they had wired to Coutts's to reserve room in their new premises for another scuttleful. All that he asked us to

do was to get on before the Ring rumbled, and show his card to our friends afterwards.

Oh yes, dear; to anticipate your inevitable inquiry, I "done it," as my tipster would have said, but it did not finish in the first eight. The horse that won was owned by the brother-in-law of the authorised printer of the official racecard, was bedded in the jockey's ambulance room on dried seaweed, patented and sold on commission by the handicapper, and came up and ate loaf-sugar out of the hand of the clerk-of-the-scales. Nevertheless, no sooner had "All right!" been called, than the preposterous horse-watcher was peacocking up and down the course in front of the lawn, closely followed by an all-night souse without shoes or socks and blackballed in perpetuity at the Rowton Residences, but shouting, with well assumed enthusiasm, "Brayvo! He's bin an' done it agen. Brayvo!" If only the poor thing had realised his possibilities, and taken a short, graduating course in one of the advertisement-concocting colleges (as the clerk of the course, who took half the profits on the tipster's cards as the price of giving permission to sell them, observed, as he stood beside me and checked the man's sales) what couldn't he have torn off the public with some more refined thimble-game, such as a new sawdust health-food, a heal-the-blind "institute," or a dud encyclopædia?

But I must on no account omit to tell you of an ingenuous incident which followed the decision of the antepenultimate event — "A Handicap Hurdle Plate of 30 sovs. (to quote the card), for the produce of mares that have never thrown a winner under any rules; gentlemen riders, Members of the Postman's Knock Hunt who have touched twice over one race to carry 7 lb. extra; the winner to be sold for 40 sovs. Two miles, over eight flights of hurdles. Six subs."

This valuable prize had just been taken by a ten-to-one shot, ridden most admirably by the acquitted co-respondent of the noble horseman who had bunkered the favourite down the wrong course, and we all filed round to the back of the stand to see the winner bought in. It was about the only thing there was to do for ten minutes or so, wherefore all but the tactiturn, the tired, and the tight-booted trapesed round to the rostrum with a Cleopatra-going-to-meet-Antony hopefulness. Round and round a small railed-in grass plot, a stable lad paced a still panting mare, whose sides were pinked by the spur, and whose knees were so far ahead of her toes, that when she stood still she looked as though she were getting ready to make a jump. There would surely be a vitriolic battle-royal to possess her, and, anticipating much spirited bidding, and being anxious not to begin till all

were assembled, the rural auctioneer stood in his pulpit rubbing his hands together like the handkerchiefless person who eats prawns in a race-train, and grinning as if he had suddenly contracted gas on the brain. Nor was he disappointed. Opposed by a venal bunch of leather-legginged get-rich-quick's, Bronzewing's owner had to go to sixty-five guineas to retain her; and then, for a moment, we looked like languishing again, for even the excitement attaching to the attempted dispersal of a sensational stud of one soon dies down. "But don't go away, please," cried the auctioneer, to our intense relief, "I've one here that also ran. Williams, bring in Little Breeches."

And Williams did. Little Breeches, a nine-year-old gelding, standing about 17.2, came into the ring sideways like a one-eyed ghost reluctantly winging its way to heaven. Little Breeches had been given a pint and a half of the celebrated "Flying Hornet" preserving whisky before going to the post, and had tried three times to hang himself in the starting-gate; now that the first effects of the powerful stimulant were working off, there remained only a splitting headache, whose mission it was to beat it into him that he had been played, and, still too doped to show resentment, he walked round and round as though in a trance.

"Now, gentlemen," cried the auction person,

"I claim your attention to Little Breeches, by Gumsucker out of Sewing Girl, by Gozo, by Wild Oats. A nice, handy animal, gentlemen, and one that is sure to pick up a perfect roll of money this winter. He's in the Sluggard's Plate at Sandown Park next Tuesday at a nice weight, and only needs keying up to concert pitch; now what may I say for him?"

But answer there came none.

"Come, gentlemen, come," rated the auctioneer, in a tone of astonished reproach, "it only wants one of you to give me a start; may I put him in at five guineas? Walk him round again, Williams. A great, slashing colt like this —he was fairly on terms with the winner at the last hurdle—and five guineas only bid! Five—five in two places—six, thank you, sir. Six guineas only for Little Breeches! About a tenth of what he'd fetch to pull an omnibus! Seven, seven—against you, sir, at seven—eight. And eight I'm only offered; have you all done at—nine, thank you, nine; may I make it ten for you, sir? Ten—going at ten——"

But even as the auctioneer hung upon his own words there came running from the inner recesses of the refreshment room a burly, fatherly man of fifty, who had the hansom-cab industry stamped indelibly all over him. He seemed amazed to find that the sale had progressed so far, while he had been painting the future of

cabbing in rosy colours and bottled stout, and he pushed and elbowed his way through the throng as though eager to retrieve lost opportunities. Ducking beneath the railings and entering the sale-ring, he stooped and ran his critical right-hand fingers up and down the fore-legs of Little Breeches.

"What's this one, mister?" he asked the auctioneer.

"Little Breeches, sir, by Gumsucker out of Sewing Girl," replied the alert salesman, and added, "and it is against you at ten. Now have you all done at ten——"

"AND SIX!" advanced the representative of the Shoful Trust, with the guileless air of one who hails from near to Nature's heart; and in two ticks he was being roughly hustled towards the bleak high road by a posse of the pantomimic pensioners done up in football pads, known as the racecourse police.

But there are more takedowns at this game of racing than are suspected by those who "do" their Derby dryfooted at their favourite music-hall —even if one gives them in the takedown by the exhilarated gentleman who is so pleased with himself at having worn dark blue and yellow braces, that he enters the stalls with them dangling at his heels for the racegoers in the pit to see and applaud. Though these stallites, after seeing St Amant spring from some-

where underneath the orchestra, execute a few wild buck and wing steps in Barnard's Ring, and then shoot bodily over the top of Mr Sherwood's cottage, may say of the sporting press what David said in his haste of all concerned, the dark thought and aching heart of desperation and despair are as often seen in racing, as the black eye and splitting headache of delirious joy. For instance, estimate if you can, the weight of anguish that is but faintly shadowed in the following letter, picked up by me from the platform at Victoria:

"PEAVINE VILLA, NEW YEAR'S NIGHT.

"MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,—

Having cried over your sympathetic letter of yesterday until I have started my nose a-bleeding, I have now hypothecated my wedding ring and keeper, as you advised, and propose to stack my drapery and return to dear old Saffron Walden to-morrow by the 10.25 from Liverpool Street. Heav'n knows I have loved James Henry (who has again recently lost his voice in formally applying for a rise in his salary) as ardently as any woman could; but the accursed Yellow Card has come between us. How little did I dream when, nine months ago, James Henry offered me his heart, his hand, and whatever was left in the weekly envelope after sweetening Topping and Spindler; and I promised that even if he could not make me completely happy no other should ever try to do so; that he entertained no thought of forsaking the double-your-stake-but-stick-to-your-martingale system!

"For many months past James Henry, whose views on

the true methods of banishing poverty lend themselves felicitously to the purposes of the vigilant humorist, has been strenuously endeavouring to choke a firm at Flushing (postage 2½d.), and take it away from them. Meantime the rent has fallen two quarters in arrear, and our butcher has had the immortal rind to stop supplies entirely. The wretched grocer has followed suit, and—from the quires of circulars telling how an eighty-shilling income should carry a £200 bill-of-sale, which are dropped into our letter-box—has mentioned the matter more than once across his counter. The climax came on Tuesday evening, when, during Henry's absence, the landlord called. He had a bunch of bananas, a bottle of whisky, and six mince pies in a paper bag ; and, saying he would rather meet me than a mowing machine *any* day, he chased me thirty-three times round the sitting-room sofa, and nearly forgot that he was a gentleman. I judged it better, however, to tell James Henry that Mr Groundrent's demeanour was extremely frigid and bitterly threatening ; for no wreck of matrimony can destroy its high ideals or take from her, who was judicious while it lasted, the gain to her own soul of unselfishly endeavouring to preserve peace at any sacrifice ; whereupon James Henry wrote as follows :

"'Look here, Groundrent, dear old soul; it galls me like sin to have to hand you the ice-bowl once again, but all my stocks are falling—Bath Tramways, Allsopp's Ordinary, Cotton Spinners' Deferred, and Schweppe's Pref.—and I can't even book a date till one of them goes up. Knowing, however, that you occasionally make out a little bit of paper when you hear of any goods of an extra-superior quality, I want you to keep your mouth shut and absorb the following right straight into your system : You must have a pony each way to-morrow, Broiled Bird in the Hardware Plate, and when it has rollicked home, just pay yourself the two quarters' rent due, and act honourably by dropping a little cheque for half of the diff. remain-

ing into any pillar-box, addressed to — Yours, and so forth.'

"The occasional charwoman's little boy took the letter round, and was unreflectingly detained in the hall—I say unreflectingly for the reason that the youth was sucking a heavy line in paregoric lozenges at the time—while Mr Groundrent penned the following reply :—

"'Sir, you omit, intentionally, or otherwise, the Turf alias of the bug-eyed slanderer who averred that I occasionally pricked the garter; but I respect your confidence, and even beg to slip you a bigger cert than changing a shilling for a blind man. I want you to take the cotton batting out of your ears and let the good thing soak right in—Bum Bailiff for the Man-in-Possession Stakes, first thing in the morning. Act honourably, as he has imperative orders to nail anything to the floor if he catches you trying to shift it.—Yours and all, N. G.'

"Broiled Bird did not, I regret to say, connect; but Mr Groundrent's nominee arrived before we were up. He is at this moment gridironing a kipper at the kitchen fire and reading aloud to our small servant the more mirth-provoking paragraphs from the "They say" column of *Stubbs's Mercantile Gazette*. Please have the spare bed well aired. I can walk up from the station, and leave my trunk in the cloakroom till later, since you say that old Snowdrop is nearly due to foal. Since Louisa took it to Southend it only fastens with a hairpin, but lord knows there's nothing in it to shock a married railway man. So no more, with love and kisses,

HENRIETTA."

And here must I break off, for the first bell has gone, and to-night dinner is to be followed by that fine old country-house frolic which

has been the beginning of so many flourishing society divorces — snapdragon with the lights out.

Thine,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE IX

EATON SQUARE, *Tuesday, February 15th.*

MY DEAR PATRICIA,—

How extremely dead are the pretty customs of St Valentine's Day! Time was when the bright, lively girl who for two or three seasons had been, as it were, a rag on every bush, used to look forward to the 14th of February to "get the office" to become the whole garment to some deserving young bachelor who had been reared with care. For such, St Valentine was a sort of last chance for late chickens, as the incubator persons say; but youths do not seem to take seriously to matrimony now, and if by chance one proposes to a girl in a conservatory or on the stairs, he calls round in the morning to apologise. And valentines—the earliest of which, dear, a red brick engraved with "Only one girl in the world for me," in cuneiform characters, which was handed by King David, the first royal co-respondent, through the transom in Uriah's roof,

you still may see in the British Museum—are quite things of the past. Lovesick swains do not give, but expect to receive, valentines in these days; and only yesterday Lady Mabel Smoothleigh was telling me how her latest "boy" had importuned her to "send me something you have kissed." But Mabel acted rather meanly, I think, in sending him her great athletic husband, a person of biceps rather than a beau, and one who while paying Mabel little attention himself is most handy at rushing up and sticking his knee in the pit of a weakling's stomach, if he catches a weakling even looking at Mabel on the rare occasions when he takes her out. I have quite frequently noticed that these burly, impetuous bridegrooms who, before marriage, exact the most definite promises that ducksie will never, never leave their sides—not even to go to the bathroom by herself—are the first to tire of propinquity and to yearn to get back to the mud of the football field on Saturday to see the Kensal Green Hotspurs lay out the Brompton Cemetery Uniteds. The unfortunate "best boy" is dreadfully damaged, I fear, and principally through his not putting himself, as the old-fashioned Methodists used to say, "in a suitable attitude to receive the blessing," but really these light-weight Josephs should make fuller inquiries.

Yesterday, let me tell you, I came perilously near falling into a new and insensate hobby: to-

day I am happily again as free and unfettered as the yellow heathen who, getting no answer to his latest prayer, pitches his Joss out into the back yard and dances a wild fandango on its breast. Yesterday I hung for awhile over the yawning chasm in which are immured "the Fancy": to-day I resume my former belief that the toy dog, with its asthma and its silk coat, and its velvet pad and its chronic snuffles, amounts to a public calamity. Write down in wine upon a rose-leaf scroll, as old Omar says, that I have had a very close shave of Caniolatry, but have got out.

I had strolled round to Grosvenor Place to carry a message from Féo to the widowed Lady Steyning, whose only daughter is so vitiated by having always been given her own way that she positively breeds Blenheim spaniels in the cream-and-gold drawing room which her anguished mother had specially modelled on that of the Viscountess Hayashi, in "the Gardens," lower down. But Io Venusta Falconrouge Mayleigh—a rather ancient and honourable name to be giving a pug-nosed tyke a carbolic bath with—simply exists for her dogs; she reads and writes and talks and dreams of nothing else—indeed she told me in confidence she veritably believed that the fascinating animal who tempted Eve was a fabled but unattainable ideal "cross" between the Schipperke and the Redwillow Airedale. Such a contention would surely have entangled even

Solomon himself—though, to be sure, the scriptural embodiment of wisdom who admitted that "the way of a man with a maid" had him beaten out of his boots would not take much losing nowadays. I felt dreadfully sorry for poor Lady Steyning, however, when the last little animal to receive its ablutions precipitated the complete outfit — basin, unguents, brushes, everything — partly over her lovely new oyster-blue moiré and liberally upon the equally beautiful green Wilton pile carpet, for her nerves are not strong and she suffers from a rheumatic affection of the eyes which constant weeping only aggravates.

But maternal tears have no effect upon Io; she has long accustomed herself to criticise her hysterical mother with considerable precision and an utter absence of sympathy; so, with a brusque but not unkindly "There, there, chop out the twaddle and turn off the tears and Vi and I may come back from the Dog Show in time to take lunch with you," she dragged me downstairs, bundled me into a hansom, and almost before I had realised it we were bowling along the newly-made roads inside Buckingham Gate and traversing a perfect forest of labourers, all swinging their picks and shovels and other armorial bearings of the fine old Brassey family.

"I confess that her eyes give her some trouble," remarked Io, as she drew her suéde gloves on in the cab, "but she's a jolly sight too

fond of calling her soul her own. The amount of 'footle,' as Mr Crosland calls it, that my brother Bill and I put up with from her exceeds human belief. *I* invariably talk back at her, but Bill, male-like, is more compassionate: he usually says nothing, taps the butler for a tenner—that's the best of paying servants regularly: you can always touch them for a bit if you run short—and then comes back in three days to see how the land lies. He'd have gone to Australia years ago, but for transportation being abolished and an idiotic system called 'passage-money' substituted. Aha! here's Piccadilly Circus; what do you say to a sherry and curacoa at the Cri.; north of this point all alcohol is outside the pale of Christian toleration?"

She has quite lost the girlishness that took Girton by storm, dear, and the charmingly confident way in which she entered the wine bar, and, sitting down at a small table and summoning a waiter, cried "Small elevens for two shareholders, and get a gait on you; we're keeping a 'fresh' horse waiting," would have compelled your admiration. Nor was she one whit less at home at the Dog Show itself. In her long tweed coat, cut loose enough in the back to give play to her gathered short skirt, and the high, tan, laced boots which only the neat-footed can wear with absolute confidence, she strutted up and down the sawdust aisles, disinterestedly accepting a saddle-

soap or hound-glove catalogue here and criticising a "nicked" or "trimmed" ear there, or declaring to some sister enthusiast that fish-biscuit manufacturers were every bit as mendacious as restaurateurs—stick to them for a month or two, and you are well done; after that you must hunt up somebody new who has got a name to make. I felt such an unqualified novice in dog matters that I could have screamed out of sheer exasperation; although I feel sure that I seemed quite deeply "in it" to Io by the hearty way she laughed when I told her how "we"—(it was an old, old story of Mr Contango's which I fortunately remembered)—won the Waterloo Cup with a dog who was trained exclusively on '48 brandy, and to whose tail a firework was adroitly attached at the psychological instant of the starting-gate going up.

We returned to Grosvenor Place to find Lady Steyning still tearful and distinctly not making the most of the placid middle age which should be her welcome portion. "I do wish you had been here an hour ago, Io, instead of dallying with your everlasting dogs," she bleated, "Sir David Fenner, from Harley Street, has been and he associates my *iritis* with the gouty diathesis—*arthritic iritis*, I think he called it. And I grieve to tell you—" (here the inevitable weeping started)—"he made no secret of the prob-ab-b-b-bility—" (here she broke down piteously)

—"of my becoming stone b-b-blind before very long!"

For a moment Io was manifestly embarrassed. She did not weep, but strolling mechanically to the piano, upon the music rack of which stood an autographed first copy of *Get Your Hair Cut*, she struck a few treble chords to regain her composure. Then, turning, she went and laid her right hand kindly on her mother's shoulder.

"Never mind, old sportie," she said, "you have always hated my 'everlasting' dogs; *now*, perhaps, you will discover the utility of them. With 'Spotty,' or 'Dearie,' or 'Flossie' on the end of a bit of string, and a stick to tap the pavements with, you can still toddle round Belgravia for many years to come!"

Suiting the action to the suggestion, Io closed her eyes and, shuffling across the room, cried in an assumed and whining voice, "Buy a box o' lights, sir, pity the poor blind, the poor blind!" For some reason or other, Lady Steyning burst into tears and rushed from the room: probably, as Io hazarded, "That blessed brother of mine has been bothering her again: he's *constantly* upsetting her."

I think that if I were Io I should take a firmer hand with a brother than she does. For a younger child he enjoys too many privileges—and naturally abuses them. Lady Steyning (whom he greatly sho' ed one night at the Opera by

shouting out to Edouard de Reszke, during his greatest scene in *Faust*, "Dy'e mind singing a bit slower, old man; my French is a bit rusty and I'm blowed if I can follow you!") thinks, for instance, that by encouraging him to go to all the best theatres and recitals, his better nature may eventually be appealed to and his baser propensities subdued. To this end she has given him *carte blanche* to ring up on the telephone her box-office agents in Bond Street, and to have put down to her account whatever seats he needs. He may be slowly assimilating music—and Io says she will back him to make more noise at a music-hall bar than Handel and Mozart and Rossini rolled together—but it is scarcely in accordance with old-fashioned views of propriety that a firm of high-standing in the musical world should have to render such a bill as the following to—

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE COUNTESS OF STEYNING.

In account with —— and ——

157A Old Bond Street, W.

To			
Feb. 10th.	1 Stage Box. Red Barn Varieties, Kilburn (Grand "Corder" Night) . . .	£2	2 0
„ 11th.	10 Resvd. Fauteuils. Peckham Parthenon (Testimonial to "Pills," head waiter) .	3	15 0
„ 12th.	4 Dress Circles. Tabnab's Tottenham Empire (First night of "Toffy's Trotter, or Tannhauser in Ten Minutes") . .	0	8 0

Feb. 13th.	2 Sofa Stalls. Poplar Pavilion (Wrestling Matinée, Acton Jim *versus* Gunnersbury Joe)	£0	15 0
„ 14th.	Grande Loge. Bow Tivoli (Compy. Benft., Widow and Childn. of Fireman Gaspipe)	3	3 0
„ 15th.	2 Standing Rooms. Club Row Parthenon, Brick Lane, E. ("Pearly" King's Select Dog Fight)	4	0 0
		£14	3 0

And it is made all the more mortifying by the unctuous leer of the shopman in Bond Street, who, when poor Lady Steyning (not having perused the account) calls in to change a book or get a new piece of music, remarks :

"Might we ask yer leddyship to favour us with yer leddyship's orders for theatre tickets a little earlier, if possible? We very nearly missed the four dress circ's for 'Toffy's Trotter' last Wen's'dy through Tabnab's Empire not bein' on the telephone."

Pray what *do* you think that preposterous girl, Euphemia Hulcot, has just done? Being still under the impression that the "rich military blood of Uncle Joseph" flows in her veins, she has procured an appointment as a field-nurse in this Russo-Japanese unpleasantness, positively! In truth, Uncle Joseph's military record was so conspicuously unbloody that, like Dod Grile's hero, his friends sought for him the Humane Society's leather medal for saving life; nor did

he lose his leg at Inkerman, but in the Marylebone Road while spending the evening at the house of a man who was not at home himself, though his wife was. Uncle's involuntary host came home quite unexpectedly, however, and, thinking the place seemed too crowded, picked up the blunderbuss with which his ancestor fought (on both sides, by the way) at Naseby, and put about twelve ounces of buckshot, some old garden nails, and various other marine stores into Uncle Joseph's left leg just as Uncle Joseph was doing Follow-the-man-from-Cook's out of the window—"a Joseph never was a stayer!" as Mrs Potiphar remarked when she cast the coat-tail into the rag-bag. Six of the smartest surgeons in all England received Euphemia's kinsman at St Mary's Hospital, and, an hour later, when he recovered consciousness, they told him not to worry over his lost limb, but to consider it as a contribution to his mashing record.

To her fugitive knowledge of surgery, gathered from the four corners of *Hahnemann Undone, or How I Spiked Homeopathy's Battery*, she has added a course of campaign training, chiefly consisting of sleeping on a seaweed palliasse out in the bicycle shed, and now she is literally bursting to ring the bell on the Red Cross League. Nothing but the Rembrandtesque hue of her tresses secured her the official permit to join the fighting line. Said the extremely exalted Jap person who gave

it, "Every time I look at that ginger nut of yours, puss, I think of a little bit of stuff that I left behind in Nagasaki, and for her sweet sake alone I will slip you the trysting place of the 10th Osaka Mounted Assassins. Hand this to their Colonel"—here he presented her with a China-town washing bill—"and he will give you the put-and-call of the field coffee-stall, such as it is. Fare you well!"

Please the pigs and she's not pinched, Euphemia will leave Western barbarians and the Albert Docks on Wednesday next, wearing a loose shirtette of wax-red pongee girded to the ear-lobe with whalebone, and confined at the waist by a gold and matrix buckle. A plain gold necklet with topaz collets and a lucky pig charm, Harris tweed knickerbockers held in place by orange silk galluses, and pegamoid putties with hand-painted chrysanthemums, will complete the toilette. She will carry a somewhat darker blouse for evening wear, and cricket shoes, in the full expectation of having to stand in some slippery places before she gets back; also a silver whist-register and marking pencil, a "Little Wonder" printing-press for marking her linen, combination purse and card-case, glove-fastener, and a small wrist-bag containing loose change for 'bus fares, etc. Thus equipped she will travel with every confidence, and is not a bit afraid of falling in with Cossacks since she is quite an adept at

climbing a telegraph pole. As her aged Uncle Joseph says, she will be more in touch with life than *he* was at eighteen, when he swarmed up the lightning rod at the Girls' High School and then found the window fastened.

On Tuesday evening, Féo having promptly gone out to play Bridge, on being told by our housekeeper that the cellar needed re-coaling—and as it is only when she revokes that she wins, her winning is never in doubt—I put into practice the theory of that one of the saints who said that, if people only knew it, there were bushels of fun to be got out of being good, by "observing" Lent at the delightful Shrove Tuesday Ball at Covent Garden; and the only living being that knows how I returned at daybreak on Ash Wednesday is the obliging market porter who drove my car home, my chauffeur having been laid out during a misunderstanding with the coachman of the brougham immediately in his rear concerning the smell of his escaping petrol. Our chauffeur, I have heard Mr Contango say, entertains the idea that he can "go a bit with his fly-dusters," in which case the man from the brougham must have been a veritable specialist, for our white-mackintoshed servitor went out like an egg-shell caught in a whirlwind. Even when the police recovered all that was left of him, there was no place to lay it out, so many dancing couples from the country having turned up quite

unexpectedly, that the limited accommodation of the Bijou Temperance Hotel was dreadfully overtaxed—indeed, the last Earl and Countess to arrive, yawning like craters, had, I am told, to put up with the boot cupboard on the lower landing.

This particular Ball was promoted, I imagine, in a purely devotional spirit, Messrs Rendle and Forsyth believing, with some accuracy, that men fast more willingly and spontaneously after an all-night tag; though it differs, I am also informed, from the dramatic annuals of other days in that the gentlemen who come chiefly to fight are never allowed to get in the way of the dancers. Save that, in the grand-circle, Lord Staffa of Iona (who is said to be so deeply interested in the dramatic career of Miss Elfie Delorme, of Daly's, and who was giving supper to a small party) dealt out a black eye to the Viscount Tynwald, one of his guests, for facetiously passing the Chateau Lafitte to a lady who had only asked for the vinegar; and that, in the corridor, two gentlemen from the Stock Exchange had a lightning mix-up on one remarking on being introduced to the other's lady, that formalities were a bit superfluous seeing that he had been fairly rancid on the bird himself some seven years ago; one might have been in almost any Belgravian drawing-room.

Oh yes! there was *one* other gentleman who

drew a Jonah ticket. For the moment I forget his name, but it was in all the papers some few months ago, when he staggered humanity by marrying his mother's maid instead of strangling her; and on Tuesday night he suddenly recognised her, though dominoed and masked, by the exceptional colour of her silk hose when she fell down during the Lancers. Of course, she was under the escort of her husband's oldest and dearest college chum (just as, in lower circles and the popular ballad, it is always that fun-loving economist "the lodger"); and, in order to plaster the walls of their private box on the second tier with the brains of the guilty pair, the wretched youth borrowed a hatchet from a fireman and ascended the stairs. He hammered on the box door; but, even as it flew open, his courage failed him, and murmuring, "No, no, I still love her too much to kill her," would have retired, axe and all, but for the numerous cohort of disappointed dancers that had followed for the express purpose of seeing that he did not do so. No sooner therefore did the guilty woman, grasping the situation, ask the crowd what it meant by this intrusion, since the cavalier at her side was the kindest friend she knew, and a real good old thing while he lasted, than an athletic young stranger who had been handling iron bridges on the Upper Nile, stepped out and gave hubby one on the submaxillary gland and two on the bugle

before he could exclaim, "Ooch!" and they took him away, I am told, on a hooded stretcher.

As to the dresses, dear, many of them were ravishing enough to have restored a madman to his senses! One of the most daring was, perhaps, "Appendicitis," worn by a shapely blonde girl attired in a mere ham-frill of aseptic nun's-veiling, caught up at the side by a scalpel and a bistoury, crossed; completeness being secured by a large grape-seed carried between the fair wearer's languorous red lips. She was awarded by acclamation a huge kettle, and was told to take it home and treasure it as it would be her last whisper in *that* show. Many men turned round to look a second time at "Skip the Gutter," an ordinary champagne muslin walking-dress, the skirt of which was carried knee high to display cochineal silk socks and opera sandals. I wish I had been able to ascertain the name of the builder of this striking creation, but before I could get through the crowd, the fair wearer had disappeared—slipped out to see if the weather seemed likely to clear up, the policeman at the door said. A beautiful St John's Wood widow, who since her gallant young husband's death at the front, has gone every night to some function or other, being too nervous to sleep alone and having not a friend on earth except the man who happens to be with her, looked perfectly distracting in

whipped cream crêpe de chine, with pink Banksia roses and raspberry underpinning—an exceedingly rococo combination.

Much more I might have had to tell you had I not been most effectually held up on the staircase by the Earl of Thirstington, who had temporarily renounced everything but whisky-and-seltzer, and who, not penetrating my disguise, would certainly have hugged me where I stood had I not addressed him sternly by his family title and threatened him with all sorts of dire penalties if he did not permit me instantly to pass. Steadied somewhat by the sound of his own name, he implored me to unmask, but finding me inflexible, he assured me that since mating unhappily in order to please his people, about two years ago, he had continually prayed that Death might overtake him, in which earnest petition his inapposite spouse had frequently joined. He had now happened to hear by the merest accident that divorces were practically free in a place called Oklahoma, and if I would only accompany him to some lonely island where we could live Crusoe fashion until he got his decree and Southern Pacific's went above 63 again, he would be a white man and make me his Countess! Only think of it, Patricia! And it was only in October last that we all went down to his private chapel at Drouth

Park to the unveiling of the stained glass window which he erected to the memory of his wife who, in the previous August, died of grief at realising that he did not kiss her as ardently as formerly!

It was a very realistic bit of acting that I put in then, Kid! Giving him my left glove, and permitting him to kiss the tips of my fingers only, I told him he might inscribe his tablets with the name of "Elsie" and ring up 55793, Holborn, some time when he had a lighter load on. Fitly humbled by this admonition, he replied that in about ten hours he should ask me to join him at lunch at the Imperial, and if from any cause I could not or would not turn up, I should be performing a distinct service to his family by calling at Vine Street, and requesting the police to have the fountain basins in Trafalgar Square dragged.

But, like Cinderella, I must do a timely duck; besides, February is all too short for long letters.

Thine,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE X

ROYAL YORK HOTEL, BRIGHTON, *March 12th.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

Your little note, forwarded to me from Eaton Square, came to hand yesterday, and just as soon as I have finished my breakfast I purpose forwarding to you in commemoration of the birthday of which you unselfishly remind me—(I would, by the way, cheerfully send you my breakfast also, but that a delicious kedgeree and a perfect champagne cup would be quite thrown away on a person whose changeless morning meal for years has consisted of a stiff brandy-and-soda and a splitting headache)—a beautiful little sapphire and diamond spittoon, which I fortunately saw in a shop window in King's Road yesterday. My memory is less definite concerning the total of your years, but considering you have had about four birthdays per annum since you became

acquainted with the fact that I possess real money in my own right, you cannot be far short of sixty.

Careless of your highly probable comment that you are being continually chevvied through life by utterly uninteresting information, I may tell you, Patricia, that a week ago I had serious thoughts of going in for athletics—fencing, punting, rowing, and especially wrestling. Bridge is all very well in its way, motoring is not so insufferably rotten, and golf, played to sacred music, satisfies the elderly, but it is the feat of honest labour that gives a girl the elasticity, the baudelarian swing of the hips, and the sweet self-confidence that she so much desires. And I had been a long-distance worshipper of athletes time enough to look upon them all as Olympian gods until my muscular chum Dot Warnford — why is it that the girl who is physically capable of throttling a Lothario with a "full-nelson," or throwing a Tarquin over her head with a "flying-mare," invariably bears a name like "Dot"?—came down last week-end. As a matter of fact I wired for her, purely and simply that she, who can infuse poetry into white canvas gymnastic shoes, or swing Indian clubs till the other girls in her environment look like a set of cripples, might feast her eyes as I have daily done upon "Socrates Aristides' Phalanx of Undefeated Graeco-Roman Champions," now

giving performances on the Pier. You have surely heard of Socrates Aristides at the London variety theatres: he is alternatively called The Aggravating Athenian? He is a truly splendid fellow, with just such a torso as they used to depict in the advertisements of Argosy braces —so widely dissimilar to that of the fashionable young man of to-day whose only exercise is betting on the tape. Aristides is, so to speak, the basic and fundamental principle of the whole show, the eight magnificent oysters adhering to the rock being the Intimidating Israelite, the Appalling Abyssinian, the Hideous Hessian, the Paralysing Parthian, the Dreadful Dalmatian, the Frightful Finn, the Horrible Hebrew, and the Terror of Tullamore. To the voice of Aristides I had listened enthralled, on many successive afternoons, as from the stage he offered to back any member of his troupe to inflict upon any comer more "falls" in one hour than the busiest woman in the Peerage would willingly acknowledge in a lifetime. Frequently some fatuous British amateur (for to our national shame no insular professors appear to be in the business at all) would essay a bout, whereat the noble Greek would call forward—say the Horrible Hebrew, who, having hitched up his worsted tubulars so that nothing might occur to mar the complete enjoyment of the programme, would proceed to put an armlock upon the stranger

that would cause him to cry peccavi in quite a loud tone of voice.

One vigorous, conclusive blow from Dot Warnford has completely shattered the rose jar! To *some* stomachs the bare and brutal truth is food, and tonic, and medicament, but my own digestive apparatus positively refuses to form chyle from crude or even unadroitly disguised veracities. The finest wine-cellar in all Mayfair may be raised upon concrete, bricked to stand for ever, and majestic in its very mustiness; but to my mind it passes swiftly away—crumbles into atomless nothingness—from the instant that an impoverished tenant begins to keep coals in it; in other words, Dot had not only seen the "Phalanx of Undefeated Graeco-Roman Champions" several times previously, but knew intimately each one of them, or, as she put it, had "met them on the mat." And thus did she proceed to strip them:

The Intimidating Israelite, said she, won his title with a pack of cards while keeping a Leyton-stone livery-stable tidy at eighteen bits per week; and the Appalling Abyssinian came to this country in charge of a performing elephant, but so outdid the pachyderm in sea-sickness all the way that he was thrown overboard in Gravesend Reach by the coarse, but facetious, sea-captain, who dearly loved a joke and thought the place not inappropriate. The Hideous Hessian came

from Shepherd's Bush; it was a noted kind of grease-paint to be bought in Garrick Street, Covent Garden, that gave to him the pale sea-green complexion of a turtle's stomach. The Paralysing Parthian and the Dreadful Dalmatian never appeared together on the same platform—indeed the parts were played by one and the same man on alternate nights in knee-pads of a different colour. Far from his being either "dreadful" or "paralysing," his late chums, at the Westbourne Park Loco Sheds (G. W. Ry.), where he had been an esteemed foreman engine-wiper, spoke of him as being "as quiet a bloke as ever grafted in a boiler works." The Frightful Finn was better known at Barnet Fair as "Dirty Mickey" who used to do a catch-as-catch-can with a bear in a boxing booth until, becoming unduly intoxicated one night, he so ragged the bear that it shouted, "Aisy, Mick, ye something fool!" and eventually drew a knife from its hind leg on him; an unfortunate affair which consummately ruined the show. The Horrible Hebrew, who originally sold patent medicines from a waggonette at market street-corners, had had the bad luck, one busy night, to get an entire batch of bile beans contaminated by coming in contact with his naphtha lamps, thereby ruining for ever his chances of succeeding in the medical profession; while the Terror of Tullamore nobody, either here or in Ireland, seemed to know any-

thing about. Dot had herself been so curious to learn something of the Terror's doubtless lurid past that she had addressed a personal note of interrogation to the Chief Constable of Leinster. This polite official, however, after making the most exhaustive and exhausting inquiries, replied that the only "terror" that had been known in Tullamore during the last half century, was a certain old lady who was in receipt of eight shillings a week from a firm of widows'-pension teamen in London, and who, immediately on receipt of postal order every Friday, expended the whole of the money in bottled porter, and then, after removing most of her clothing, proceeded to delight the populace by dancing in the streets, varying the performance occasionally by standing on her head. Why is it, I wonder, that elderly ladies invariably dance when under the influence of alcohol?

Thus passes my infatuation of yesterday, and with the departure of the athletic Dot, with her dumb-bells and developers and her efficacious substitute for heavy bedclothes, the very mention of which has often caused a sudden suffusion of blood to the temples of a modest listener of the adverse sex—"You don't catch me in bed," says she, "without a *Sportsman* between the blankets!"; only meaning, of course, that the journal of that name, being printed on particu-

larly good paper, gives warmth without weight —I shall subside to my former feminality, contemptuous neither of mice nor men.

It always amuses me to recall your bygone but well-remembered remark, that life in Brighton consisted principally in changing clothes and inquiring for letters, for it never fails to set me wondering whether, at the time of your last visit to the Sussex shore, you were too young to be ardent—an overgrown, scraggy schoolgirl to be kept out of mischief by close surveillance—or old enough to be jaded—a mere gawky and uninteresting cipher in that desert of humanity, the big hotel. In all probability, however, you would have sound economical motives for visiting Brighton during June or July, when the leaders of the aristocracy in the King's Road are the second bride of the great cereal breakfast-food, or the mamma and daughters of the sixpenny summer-drink crystals, "pure, wholesome, and possessing the pleasant aroma and refreshing acidity of the fresh-cut lemon?" It makes all the difference.

As I close these sentences the woman whose ripe beauty and rich millinery have been the talk of Brighton for a month past, is weeping herself hideous across two lawn pillows and behind drawn blinds in the costliest mansion in Hove, while the youth who was harpooned three weeks ago, and who resigned himself to

her absolute despotism until yesterday, is on his way to Ghargaroo in the Unfriendly Islands. The conquest of young Mr Bruton Berkeley by Mrs Lottsmore Barres, the junobusted relict of the late Colonel B. Gopher Barres, who founded the famous American trust for manufacturing baking-powder from the eggs of the sea-urchin and who met his death through getting his feet wet while playing the hose on his stocks, had startled even Brighton (for whose benefit matrimony is locally supposed to have been exclusively invented) by its suddenness. For Mr Berkeley had seemed (and probably was) quite a shy and blameless youth, satisfying neither the eye nor the judgment, and remarkable only for the uniform vapidity of his expressions. Meeting Mrs Barres, whose evening lace stockings and patent-leather Richelieu shoes are a byword down here, at a dance-supper at the Dome, however, the boy formed the instant opinion that she fairly out-classed all other representatives of her sex, and on telling her as much, was invited to call upon her on the following afternoon. It was whilst paying this pleasant call that he got what was coming to him.

It was indeed within five minutes of his arrival, while his charming hostess, dressed to within an inch of her life, had him alone in the

Louis-the-Something drawing-room, telling him of her unhappy married life with the late Colonel, and just how the Supreme Court gave her a decree on her substantiating her complaint that the respondent refused to divide his popcorn fairly that, without any warning, her nose began to bleed quite freely. Ever resourceful and ready for emergencies, Mr Berkeley rushed to the door, turned and took the key, and promptly rammed it down Mrs Lottsmore Barres's well-covered back, doubtless noticing as he did so that she would act wisely in future in renouncing all such nourishing food-stuffs as sweet potatoes, butter, cream, sugar, new bread, and chocolates. At that moment steps were heard in the corridor outside; some one tried the door, and finding it locked, began to knock. Upon realising the awfulness of the position, and the further fact that she could not return the key without disrobing in the presence of an acquaintance of only one day's standing, Mrs Lottsmore Barres promptly fainted, and—well, in true Lovelacian acknowledgment of the thoughtless way in which he had compromised the lady, Mr Bruton Berkeley empowered the sixteen male and female servants who at this juncture burst in the door to announce his immediate and formal engagement to their mistress. In place of the prosaic hand-shake with which his arrival had been greeted,

Mr Berkeley departed with a warm and affectionate kiss upon his lips and a large panel photograph by Sarony, measuring 17 × 36, without the massive silver frame, beneath his arm. It may have been not recently taken, but it showed the upper two-thirds of Mrs Lottsmore Barres in half-tone profile, laughing artlessly over her right shoulder at an imaginary husband who was being taken to prison for her dressmaker's bill, and was calling back to enjoin her not to forget during the coming sixty days that she was still a married woman. In return, Mr Berkeley sent Mrs Barres a hurried tinograph of himself taken on the beach, not as a permanent record but as a sort of carry-over until the photographers in East Street could finish for him a set of cabinets; which done, he set up the magnificent picture of his fiancée on a gilt and plush easel in his hotel bedroom.

Alas! why does not some unseen power obliterate us all, just as we have reached and sat for awhile on the topmost pinnacle of earthly happiness? What heartaches might be spared were we in the midst of all our glory to be eternally debarred from drifting back into the muddy pool of humdrum conventionality! That night Mr Berkeley lay gazing upon the limned presentment of his love by the light of the expiring fire, precisely as did Wordsworth—or

perhaps I should have said Shelley—when he wrote, his languid eyes still fixed upon her portrait:

> "Of herself but a mere reminder
> Till the shadows began to creep,
> Then, taking one 'tot' as a binder,
> I suddenly fell asleep."

Eight hours later, during the comparatively disagreeable moments of returning consciousness which preface the superlatively disgusting necessity for getting out of bed, Mr Berkeley noticed that his window was wide open, that the lace curtains were floating and flapping like pennants in the morning breeze. He next observed that towering above the quite ordinary disorder of a varnished pump on the washstand, a shower of silver coins on the hearthrug, and a dress-coat in the fender, there existed a more definite and significant disarrangement of his chamber's ameublement. Diamond pins and ruby rings and pearl shirt-studs bestrewed the floor: money and jewellery were scattered on all sides. Here lay a bureau drawer, all ransacked and upturned; there a jewel-case, wrenched and rummaged, but not robbed; the lock of yonder wardrobe had been raped, the sartorial contents of the wardrobe searched and flung about, but neither damaged nor depleted; nothing did the scene suggest so vividly as the tousled track

over which an irascible woman had hunted in vain for a fugitive but favourite hat-pin.

But stay——

From the golden easel the panel portrait of Hortensia Lottsmore Barres had alone been stolen! The survey of a single instant served to show that there now adhered to the gilt ledge upon which the cherished likeness had so lately stood nothing but a scrawled note, written apparently with much haste, and the charcoal end of a burned match. Jumping out of bed and clutching the precious document, Mr Bruton Berkeley read:

"SLUMBERING UNKNOWN,—

"This is a let-off for you, and no sanguinary error! Much, however, as I need fresh financial underpinning, I cannot 'ease' you with *her* eyes watching me. With one exception, you will find your props as safe, if not as undisturbed, as if they had been spiked down: I have half-inched nothing but the portrait of—MY MOTHER! I had been told she was in Heaven: I lament the lie, but hope, as the next best, that she's still in Society—not that *I* go out much; in the daytime, anyway. If I now ask you not to marry her, it is less on account of caring whether you are lynched for bigamy, than that you don't somehow connect with a dream I had of my next stepfather.

"Yours for a true bill,

"PYTHAG THE PORCH-CLIMBER."

Inasmuch as the burglar had left untouched quite five hundred pounds worth of property, not including the two ham sandwiches which he had tied beneath his boot soles to deaden the sound of his footsteps, and which were fully identified by the barmaids from the railway station later in the day, the genuineness of his letter was beyond reasonable questioning; yet Mr Berkeley timidly but successfully shunned Mrs Lottsmore Barres until the evening. Then, with the rare daring that is born of drink, he burst into her presence and inquired with all the confidence possessed by one who feels that things are coming his way, what she thought of the old Greek philosophers in general, and of Plato and Pythagoras in particular? Suspecting nothing, Mrs Barres replied that she had always regarded Plato as a bit of a hold-over, but as for dear old J. H. Pythag — how fateful was the abbreviation!—"why, he should have been nothing less than a Vanderbilt, 'specially for his brainy distinctions 'tween the soul an' the body!"

That was enough! Like a true squire of dames, Mr Bruton Berkeley held his peace at the time, but pulled his freight out of Brighton with the coming of night. He is now upon the high seas, and his friends here are sanguine that he will fare well. There is little risk, after all, in consigning an easy-going, good-natured lad

of mettle, totally devoid of either solidity or ambition, to a horde of friendly cannibals; whereas an older person of high morals and credentials going out to such a place as Buenos Ayres to take up an official position, would certainly be preceded by his reputation for strict integrity and incorruptibility, and on that ground alone would be instantly murdered on arrival. As for Mrs Lottsmore Barres, her wound will quickly heal. Like the racing peer who could never set eyes on the late Mr Weatherby without feeling an irresistible desire to scratch something, the mere sight of an eligible bachelor steels her for conquest. She will array her form in new frocks and her soul in new sentiments and, with a yellow dog for a mascotte, re-enter the fray. I do not know that I myself may not risk paying her a visit of condolence this afternoon: man-hunting is not contagious, is it?

Almost the only drawback to being out of town at this season is that one rather fails to grasp some of the allusions to "What the Little Birds are Saying" in the only possible ladies' newspaper; so, dear, though well aware that you cannot take up a pen without losing a lie, *may* I ask you to furnish me with the diagrams to the following:—

OVERHEARD BY THE LITTLE BIRD

In Chesterfield Gardens — "That Lady Alberta would certainly do well to swear off for a season and give it a much-needed rest."

At the same—"That her coronet only kept on her head by the timely aid of her left ear at the christening of the new torpedo-destroyer last Thursday."

At the same—"And that when it came to naming the vessel *Polyhymnia*, she simply couldn't stick it."

On The Lees—"That the gallant and much-to-be-pitied Major acted foolishly in going for the Rajah as he did."

At the same—"That all Folkstone has known about it for weeks, but never expected anything half so rich as last Saturday's free, *al-fresco* entertainment."

At the same—"That the genial old soldier's sporting instincts came out strongly even in his wrath when he kicked the whitey-brown, half-clad co-respondent in embryo three times round the new golf links, of which he is such an enthusiastic hon. sec."

At the same—"That it never would have happened if the timepiece in the boudoir had not been forty minutes slow — despite

the fact that when Cupid gets both arms full he is apt to forget to keep an eye on the clock."

In Great Marlborough Street—"That His Lordship's friends would certainly have succeeded in finding the required bail: but that it was Her Ladyship who prevented them."

At Holloway—"That it was additionally unfeeling of Her Ladyship to restrain His Lordship's friends from providing him with suitable food, but that he contrived to support existence till the morning on some Nubian blacking and a sickly pot of egg-plants which had been abandoned by a former occupant."

On Deeside—"That it is quite true, as the Honourable Mrs Tufflold-Knutt informed the *Era* interviewer after her recent private theatricals, that she doesn't *really* know how old she is."

At the same—"That if we were anything approaching the same age we wouldn't want to know, either."

At the Hotel Sessil—"That Mr Pierpoint Morgan, who is carrying everything but his coat-tails before him, is about to subsidise the Jaffa-Jerusalem Railway (which connects also with Joppa by sacred-bull team) so that the 10.45 A.M. daily from Tyre (the famous "Flying Levite") will now be electrified and re-upholstered; and ice-water, boxes of figs, and cheap editions of 'The

Strenuous Life' and 'Mr Dooley' will be obtainable on all cars."

In Jermyn Street—"That the mystery surrounding the disappearance of the Honourable Hughie's socks, whilst their owner was being massaged on Tuesday, has not been cleared up; meanwhile the attendant declares on oath that Hugh brought none with him."

At the same (in the Cooling Room)—"That Hugh prized them more particularly from the fact that he bought them years ago in a tavern bar in Old Broad Street of a now leading light of the Kaffir market."

At the Bazaar in Aid of the Asylum for Disabled Thought Readers—"That Lady Ena considers the husband who goes to Lhassa and remains there a greater benefactor than the one who returns home unexpectedly."

At the same—"That the introduction of the flurried individual as 'the famous telepathic faith-healer from Athens was an exceedingly clever bit of invention, all in sixty seconds, although the 'faith-healer' more than once came perilously near wrecking everything by causing the Athenian to chatter alternately the pidgin of a Bowlamine Chinaman and brogue of a music-hall Irishman."

At the same—"That blind faith, insatiable hope, and boundless charity are unquestionably the principal ingredients in Lord Samuel's composition."

Grieved indeed am I to hear that a bad oyster, carelessly swallowed while laughing at Lord Archbold's diverting story of the old donkey-woman at Ramsgate, who neglected Sterne's admonition to keep one's eye on one's ass has kept you to your room of late, but if your winning enough to take you to Lincoln depends on my telling you of a "fetid, mephitic outsider which will be certain to fiddle into the first three in the Handicap," you will stay away from bleak Carholme this spring; but from your remark that you are experiencing a "stern touch of stuckology," I judge that the last litter of blue Persians was a flam. Though this is perhaps as well, since prosperity swallows up one's energy and obscures one's virtues, I regret that I cannot at the moment indicate a prize strain of felines that will reproduce its species for the sale-bench once a fortnight, while their owner is mastering the primary principles of Bridge. Should I hear of one at the Dome, during "Israel in Egypt" to-night, however, I will put a blue tag on it and reserve it for you.

What odd things servants do say at times! Do you know, Patricia, as Marshall was dressing my hair this morning, she suddenly exclaimed, "Aren't you surprised to learn, my lady, as how the Earl o' Mintstalk was once a domestic servant?" And when I asked her what on earth she meant, she said "Anyway he admitted before

Sir Francis Joon yesterday, that for years before they was married her leddyship was his *mistress!*"

But there goes the dinner gong and, as an admirable chef is easily slighted and I am just about as ravenous as a hyæna with tapeworm, adios, little one, adios!

Your affectionate friend,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE XI

EATON SQUARE, *Friday, April 8th.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

Should you chance to have by you such a thing as a disused buffalo motor-coat, a suit of cast-off oilskins, or any other old garment which is too conspicuous to donate to the ordinary social leper, would you kindly send it to the P. and O. Agents at Marseilles—in the Rue Noailles, I think—to await the return of poor Euphemia Hulcot, whose high motives have been so shamefully tampered with by the Japanese Censor at the front that she is returning to pickle the walnuts and label the jam at her home in Kent, but desires to re-enter London unobserved? Arriving with the Imperial Army at Wiju, literally tingling with the desire to nurse back to health the victims of the spiteful *jui-jitsu* (or whatever is the name of the national ambidextrous cussedness) and incidentally to paint comprehensive word pictures for the *Ladies' Sphere*, she found it not at

all nice to be allocated, under fixed arms, to a quiet hamlet consisting of a house and barn, once made of rice paper, containing a wild cat and a pack of cards, and situated on a sandy ridge between two millet fields. She certainly had told off to see that she didn't go away, two little brown men with half a pair of crimson overalls between them, who told Japanese stories which no lady could possibly have heard had they not been related with an accent that was simply delicious to listen to; also she was given a bamboo gun that would carry popcorn as far as where the sitting-room window had been knocked out (and most of the wall along with it) but with strict instructions in the event of an outbreak to return the weapon at once to the sentries.

All this was well enough in a way, but the disabilities far outweighed the advantages, and at any reference to war the little brown men became mentally opaque. Thus when Euphemia attempted to "draw" them by comparing the situation to the first campaign in Italy in 1796, they professed not to have heard of Napoleon as a fighter, though they remembered all the others, including Jack Dempsey and Gus Ruhlin; moreover the only accommodation offered a lady correspondent wishing to change her garments was the open country behind the ha-ha, or mimosa, bush.

At first Euphemia merely protested in a

formal way, but finding this of no avail, she ultimately insisted on being taken before General Kuroki, to whom (despite his many polite protests that he was already five minutes overdue on a previous engagement to hold a hand-to-hand argument with General Kuropatkin in a mudfield at Ping Yang) she explained that it might be just as well if he understood that, although she had temporarily assumed the duties of special correspondent to the *Ladies' Sphere*, she was the most strictly virtuous and religious unmarried lady that ever came out of a country where the easiest thing imaginable for a smart girl to do was to marry any man she wanted to; that though the average Japanese lady was so inviolably sacred that she was kept indoors till she degenerated into a sort of tit-bit of family furniture, you couldn't come that racket on the rosebuds of the West, where no man was obliged to feel the burden of daughters who took proper care of their early education. She didn't see anything in that to grin at. Her family had fought and bled for Great Britain since before boxing-gloves were invented—till, in fact, it had come to be regarded as the country's standing Gibraltar; and she didn't propose to travel twelve thousand miles to be shut up in a tissue-paper bandbox with nothing but an Asiatic wild cat to which she had not been properly introduced, to suit the likes of anybody. Representatives of allied nations—she should not

particularise—might get transitorily dippy over winning one or two skirmishes with hairy convicts done up in padded ulsters; but "who was't betrayed the Capitol; who lost Marc Antony the world; who was the cause of a long ten years' war and laid at last old Troy in ashes"? A snubbed lady correspondent at the front, she believed.

The General made no reply—a man's real character is only visible in moments of intense emotion—but, signalling for a fountain pen to a soldier who had just got a hammer-lock on a Seoul ploughboy whom he had spotted passing with a pocketful of contraband gingerbread, he wrote out the following and gave it to Euphemia with a kiss and a large red apple which he had brought with him from Anju:

"*To our Soldiers in General, and the* 10*th Osaka Mounted Assassins in especialty. See to it:*

"*That our well-beloved sister, Euphemia of the Greyhound Legs, the Unwon Bosom, the acquired staccato trot of Tokio; being neither geisha, fleur-de-lit, nor ex-swell rag from the Transwaal, stayeth out of doors as late as she listeth. She doth it for the love of us, and she's copyright, she is. Nix general orders; to the C Division say she is our laidifriend and has our private countersign, 'Pass the beancake. Banzai!'*

"*May your wounds be as halfpence in the Dai Ichi Ginko,*

"*KUROKI.*"

Being an advanced disciple of freethought and consequently holding no superstitions as to the eating of apples, Euphemia at once publicly consumed one half of the red pippin, giving the remaining half, with the large, fat worm in it, to the sentry ; but matey as the General had seemed, he really had neither soul nor conscience behind his little brown eyes. From the time Euphemia accepted that special permit, she was as nobly a fool-on-furlough as the darkest African belle that ever was satisfied with a piece of red cloth or a handful of glass beads. Honeyed as that written watchword looked, it was substantially the roughest turn-down that ever was put into cipher. Officers to whom Euphemia produced it shed torrents of tears out of formal politeness, but knew exactly how many pieces of luggage she was carrying, and precisely what sort of stockings she had on ; and daily she realised that she was drawing nearer, nearer, nearer to the outposts. One evening a lieutenant-colonel of infantry, so repulsively plain that his poor face actually ached from the pain caused by its terrible shape, put a mark like a Whistlerian butterfly on the top corner of the passport, and thereafter, the soldiers who inspected it—and Euphemia—simply whistled through their teeth at her. At Feng-huan-cheng she was imprisoned for ten hours and slapped on parade before all ranks for applying the term "a nasty, insulting, old barn-choote" to

a brigadier-general who had passed upon her some remark which, though unintelligible, was doubtless coarse, since it caused the sentries to drop their weapons and roll on the floor with laughter : at Taku-shan the captain of the block-house read the warrant, smiled at Euphemia, counted his money, then shrugged his shoulders and motioned to her to pass away ; it was the same all through the lines. To this or that person in high office she applied, day by day, in docile and submissive mood, but, like the small boy who was eaten by the domesticated lion in the circus at Barnsley, went away in a pet.

Everywhere and all the day, she says, the stranger's leg is vigorously pulled. Even the little Jap who, during his convalescence after being wounded at Souchou, embroidered for her with alleged cherry-blossoms a square of black satin, gave her his name as Ohara Whirroo ; and she has since discovered that the silk-stitched blossom bears a strange and striking resemblance to the potato-plant. Ultimately catching the infectious habit of dissembling the most unpleasant convictions, she taught herself at last to round-off the most conventional commonplaces with some such phrase as "Thanks, thou colossal and incomparable object of envy to Ananias ; thanks!"

But her pity for the wounded Russians who fell into her hands was very real—as well it might

be. They were brought to fight from the prisons on the convict island of Sakahalin, and had to bear the brunt of the battle in proportion to their past offences. Thus, the first line of defence was composed of murderers, money-lenders, manufacturers of inflammable flannelette underclothing, and pleaders of the Gaming Act. The second consisted chiefly of stewards of hunt-meetings, burglars, baby-farmers, and dermatologists from West Virginia convicted of grafting male skin on to female chins to supply the market with bearded ladies for freak museums; the last line of all being the defaulters of alimony and the unmuzzled dog summonses. The greatest grievance of all was perhaps that which was cherished by an exile from Warsaw, whose internal clockwork had been rudely disarranged by eighteen inches of triangular steel at the end of a Nagasaki musket at Chongju.

"It's all very well for these here Japs to blow about dispensin' justice distilled to an essence," he remarked to Euphemia, "but to be bayoneted in the *gutz** for failin' to abate a smoky chimney is a bit sultry, ain't it?"

A few days ago, Phyllis Waring was keenly desirous that I should accompany her to Paris to see if *Monsieur le Matou* is a suitable piece to put on at the forthcoming performance by the

* A purely Muscovite idiom for the pantry parts, the seeming crudity of which is to be deplored.

Copthebird Strollers in aid of the Asylum for the Indignant Blind, but as I am rather fed up with the French (to say nothing of the idiotic Strollers, whose sixteen skittish lady amateurs are already quarrelling as to which first takes "Dick" when *Whittington* is produced next Christmas) who sorely need some good and true friend to point out to them that, having invented matrimony, as they are fully persuaded they did do, it was unlike them not to patent it and thereby secure their just fees and royalties; and as, unlike myself, Phyllis evinces no desire to shun the ephemeral intimacies that travellers are so ready to establish, she would be sure to find some chivalrous male person aboard the boat to hold her head at the taffrail, I did not go. And now it seems that *Monsieur le Matou* is but a rehashing of the old, old *ménage à trois* idea, for knowing naught of which poor Uriah of Scripture history got steered against his Waterloo. Poor Uriah! Himself entertaining Hittitic objections to bathing—(he simply hated sanitation and always swore that it would hasten his end)—he still had gentlemanliness enough to relax his customary surveillance while his fair wife performed the ablutions which he admired but did not understand, and he sate down outside on the little cork mat, smiling to think how well-beloved he was quite apart from any question of money. He smiled again in a self-satisfied way as he heard the water splashing

within, for he remembered how he had said on first seeing the laving tank when he took over the new house, "Aha! Some silly fool will be drowned in this, but it won't be me!" and there and then did he renew his vow that the only way they should ever get him into the thing would be to chloroform him first. Poor Uriah! How little did he suspect that, even at that moment, there was creeping on his royal stomach across the tiles——

But I must not bore you to death with all this moralising, dear.

In *Monsieur le Matou* the *tertium quid* is an operatic tenor who, adoring Madame la Chatte for her dulcet tones alone, drops in to try her voice, while M. le Matou is at the chase, pursuing the bloodthirsty hare, the fierce hedge-sparrow. At the psychological moment—just as Madame closes her eyes to take the upper C—Monsieur bursts in, a plume in his hat, a tasselled bag hanging from his neck, a very arsenal bristling in his brown belt. Instantly the wretched pair, while imploring him to spare their lives, fall at his feet, implying that, if the worst comes to the worst, they will, like the man who was on a hiding to nothing the first time Tom Sayers saw him, "take it lying down."

"No, no!" cries M. le Matou, pronouncing the tag as the stage hands take hold of the guy ropes in readiness for a quick curtain, "I do

not purpose to destroy you here, but you will find that my terms are worse than death itself (sensation). They are that you, sir, do this very night take her with you to Marseilles (increased sensation) by the 9.15 on the Paris-Lyons-et-Méditerranée!" (loud groans and hisses, several ladies in the audience who have in the course of their checkered careers been inveigled into this train, swooning away in their fauteuils).

After the manner of British adventurers into France, Phyllis rends the restaurants (and the native tongue) without mercy, but she will have to be told that there is really no such word in the French, or any other language, as "Kwezeen," and no necessity for it; though, truly, it was commendable moderation in her not to write "Kweezeen," as is commonly done by the otherwise gifted authoress of "How to Give a Monday Lunch for a Dozen without Spending a Tosser." The correct thing is "cuisine," and to spell things with a "K" which look softer with a "C" is to prove that one was born when the sign was wrong. It is news, however, that the wearing of captive insects is again *de rigueur;* and Phyllis was fortunate enough to secure a magnificent specimen of a dark green hunting-cased cockchafer, held by a gold chain. It must have looked awfully *chic*, she says, as she sat in the fauteuils of the Odéon, but it

unfortunately got into a fight with the armour-plated tiger-beetle of the lady sitting behind, and, losing its off forceps in the second round, was pounced upon by the watchful harlequin scarabæus, or "Cairo timberman," of the lady on Phyllis's left, with which it more than held its own until the audience yelled for M. Poë to enter the ring and separate them. Phyllis does not despair of nursing the great green beauty back to its former health, but it has incurred a fearful "mouse," she says, and will hereafter wear a "thick ear" to its dying day.

The first flower that blooms in the spring, dear, is the nettle, and though mere seasonage never yet caused Féo's perennial human poisonous plant a second's uneasiness, Mr Contango has just stung her "good and plenty," as they say at the Sessil, by getting run in on a consolidated charge of assault and battery, also defamation of the character of prosecutor's sister, obstructing the thoroughfare of Swallow Street, Regent Street, whilst drunk and incapable, and damaging a constable's uniform. It is a narrow and craven story, though the verification of some of the charges at the first hearing, which terminated in a remand, brought a sweet-and-twenty smile to the stern-and-sixty dial of the salaried Solon who exists only to side-pocket his patrons.

To a lady who resided in Burleigh Mansions

and who, while appearing in court in a tight-fitting frock of blue silk with a white Panama pulled well down over her eyebrows, claimed the modern privilege of remaining heavily veiled and testifying as "Mrs X.," Mr Contango had given a cheque for five pounds, the only consideration being (he said) that it was to form the nucleus of a fund which "Mrs X.," and several other society ladies were promoting to purchase the penny steamboat *Citizen*, now moored off Cleopatra's Needle, and fit her up as a hospital ship for service in the Yellow Sea. Though "Mrs X.'s" family, counsel said, was a notable old Saxon one and might have altered English History had not her early ancestor, who treated Edward the Confessor for scrofula, met his death whilst cat shooting in the Royal Forest of Pimlico, owing to the bullet leaving his weapon at the butt, she undoubtedly had a brother who was at the present time a cabman. She admitted having mentioned this person to the prisoner with reference to the hospital ship, her relative, who had frequently observed that "cabbing was no conjure," having said give him a barrel of bitter and the run of a bedstead shop, and he would transform the *Citizen* into the talk of the Thames. She had also seven sisters, six of whom were willing to leave the stage to become hospital-ship nurses, but the seventh, who had freckles and a cock eye, had permanently settled

in the postal service. But the payment of five pounds had nothing whatever to do with marine matters and she didn't think any the more of the prisoner, who *called* himself a gentleman, for trying to shift the cut on her in that way.

Meantime the cheque, having been enthusiastically dishonoured, was returned to "Mrs X.," who subsequently sold it for two shillings as a natural curiosity to another of her brothers, who, as Charlie Upham, kept a starting-price office for military turfites of approved references in Swallow Street. In this capacity Upham was quite well acquainted, and occasionally did business, with Mr Contango, up to the time when the latter had five half-dollars on Pitch Battle at Nottingham, at 100 to 12, and was offered, in settlement, his own discredited stumer, a postal for three bob, and twenty-eight half-penny stamps. It was then that he assaulted and battered Upham in his office, and was flung out of the window, amid the thunder of the captains and the shouting; and the humane C Division of police, finding him lying on his back, too frail to withstand the contamination and wickedness of the outer world, reversed him by his wrists and ankles, and carried him inside.

Féo no sooner heard of it than, with the promptitude of a Napier, she rang up that old

and trusted repository of shameful secrets, our family solicitor—by which please do not misunderstand me to mean our City, or put-and-call solicitor, who is so bewitching a figure at dramatic first nights; our smart solicitor, who hangs up his red golf jacket and takes down the *Cause List* with a large yawn; or our mere buffer solicitor, who is rude to rural benches over our furious-driving summonses; but our old family solicitor. She rang up Mr Coke and bleated that her latest needs were far too sacred to be related over the phone with Gerrard listening, but would he take the very first vehicle on the rank, no matter if it were only a dust-cart, and come to her instantly. And he did.

It was raining rather smartly as they left the house, some twenty minutes later, and the old lawyer had brought no brolly; but Féo could not possibly order the carriage for such an odious destination as Brixton Stir; she could not even suffer a hansom to be whistled to the door.

"Give Mr Coke an umbrella," she cried, as though she herself were contemptuous of the weather, and two footmen in powder instantly drew from the stand an elegant parapluie with an ebon stick, surmounted by a crutch of tortoise shell bound and heeled with eighteen-carat gold.

All through the long ride to the prison at Brixton, Féo lay back in the shadows of the four-wheeler's cushions in gloomy silence, her bosom rent by conflicting emotions. For years past she had lain her very life—she who had the figure of Diana and the beauty of an Aphrodite — at the clay feet of a man who now regarded her only as nine stone of stale cake. Against his myriad infidelities she had promulgated no decree, well knowing that it would only be disobeyed in such hearty fashion as to reduce to *débris* the prestige of wifely authority; but her soul had sunk within her when she had heard how her Sandown badge had been worn by the kitchenmaid at the Skittle Club; she had groaned aloud when asked to believe that such a wire as "For heaven's sake send her a 'monkey' to shut up" was merely an impassioned appeal by an unknown London solicitor to a perfect stranger, on behalf of a ruined old lady litigant who only yearned for an ape to keep in confinement and make a pet of. For any woman in the throes of such woe as this, it was the refinement of torture to read of the Chinaman who believes implicitly in his wife's fidelity so long as he sneezes once in an hour, and whose wife persuades him always to wear a wet handkerchief inside his hat to keep his dear old shaved pate cool. Yet China was a cultured nation a thousand years before Britain

showed the slightest sign of becoming the delightful Nonconformist poultry-yard she is to-day. Socially, no less than matrimonially, Contango was a complete fizzle. A sable evening suit he simply loathed, but took a positive pride in the frayed and unravelled "County-court" shirt in which he "appeared" before tribunals, which reduced the claims of his more importunate creditors to crossing-sweepers' doles of a crown a month, and sometimes he got judicial "orders" set aside indefinitely. He did daily homage to his judgment-summons alpaca-jacket, and bowed down and worshipped his judge-in-chambers brown billycock; but all these things were as goads and undergarments of horsehair to Féo, who, now that the miserable backslider was under lock and key, could not decide whether in view of future peace of mind it was not more desirable to keep him in than to get him out.

They found him in his cell at Brixton, sprawling in a wooden chair in a Martin Harvey attitude, but not wholly broken in spirit—indeed, he had only recently passed some remarks about the administration of the civil law in England, of such a character that the head warder had resigned his long-coveted office simply in order to avoid future contiguity to Middlesex debtors in general. Though Féo tearfully addressed

Contango by his pet name, he only stared at her vacantly and bit his nails. Then his wandering eyes fell, for the first time ever, upon the old attorney, and the result of their brief inspection was clearly unfavourable. His first glance of scornful indifference quickly hardened into a deeply interested stare, and the debtor even raised himself upon his elbows and finally inclined his body forwards, the closer to continue his scrutiny. Tinge by tinge the passion rose in his face till at last he sprang from his seat. In a burst of fury he turned upon the octogenarian from the Temple.

"Strike me up a plum tree, this is too, *too* thick! You may have taken advantage of my temporary incarceration to supplant me in the affections of my wife, you hoary remnant of sin and senility!" he shrieked, "but I'll be eternally damned if you, or any other man, holds successional rights in my best umbrella! Come on!"

With that he literally showered blows—roughly estimated by a visiting J.P. who was slowly recovering from the jumps—at 300,000 in number, but probably less, since Mr Coke's prostrate body was recovered, minus the umbrella, within nine or ten minutes; whereas, even if the punches came at the rate of 250 a minute, which is quick work——

But I am not sure that I do not prefer to

run downstairs to lunch, and leave the problem, if they care to solve it, to the bright young mathematicians of the seventh page of the *Daily Mail*, who, given three figures and a bit of chalk, can be backed to figure the knocker off the front door at any time.

Au revoir, ma chère,

VIOLA.

EPISTLE XII

EATON SQUARE, *Friday, May 12th.*

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

The postmark on your cheery little note to hand this morning throws a lurid light on the cat-like sneak you executed out of Charbonell's last Friday afternoon, after positively insisting that I should drink a dish of tea with you. As I told you at the time, I once swore to a relative, since dead, never to touch tea until I wanted it; but I had no idea that you contemplated wolfing three chocolate eclairs and a buttered scone and proceeding direct to Paris, even though, as you aver, you acted upon a sudden impulse to write a Rita-like series of articles for *The Gentlewoman* entitled "What I saw in Montmartre." A graphic description from a capable pen of what you did *not* see in Montmartre would be far more likely, I think, to increase the circulation of any newspaper. I had meant asking you on which three nights of

this week you could make use of our box at the Opera, but as your letter is headed merely "Wednesday," which I didn't seem to think would find you in a big place like Paris, I simply couldn't—as the fair candidate for the chorus of the new musical-comedy remarked on observing that her mother had put out a pink flannelette set for her to go and have her voice "tried" in. Anyway, I hope that you may have an exciting and adventurous time in Lutetia, a desire which I express with increased confidence since reading in this morning's newspapers, that bands of impoverished but resourceful Parisians are earning a precarious livelihood by throwing young women, ostensibly of the unfortunate class, into the Seine, and then rescuing them under the eyes of the benevolent.

I have, by the way, something more than a fanciful and fantastic notion that Paris may hold me within the next forty-eight hours, for our household is at the moment as intolerable to me as was that of the ambitious young gentleman who, in defence of his alleged want of family pride, pleaded that it was expecting too much of one whose father was in Dartmoor, whose sister was in Regent Street, and whose mother was going about London with a wen as big as a diving-bell. As usual, Mr Contango is at the bottom of the spasm. But while the brilliancy and variety of that man's errors throw a reflected

glory upon his inventive genius and effectually preclude the possibility of his turning over a new leaf without investing in an entirely fresh book, his repeated backslidings are surely undermining the nerves, and consuming the very molecules and corpuscles of Féo's delicate physical adjustment. No sooner is one epoch of recidivation bottled up by a sickening course of vespertinal canoodling than another severe slump, calculated to cause the entire building to vibrate, is ripening in some other quarter, until it really seems that the only domain in which Mr Contango could be confidently relied upon to keep out of trouble, would be an iron-barred niche high on the face of the most inaccessible peak of Popocatapetl.

When I went to her boudoir this morning to execute a quick touch for the price of some long-coveted green tourmaline pendants, Féo was reclining on the sofa, like the gentleman who sat down "unbeknownst" on the box of fusees, face downwards, and sobbing her very heart out. A torn blue envelope, inscribed in the familiar hand of our hired Sherlock, which lay upon the floor, told me instantly that the dreadful Contango had once again been weighed in the balances and found several hundredweight against the purchaser; but with the "Festina lente" of the Onslows ever before me, I contented myself by inquiring the interesting nature of the poor

wretch's vapours—and that in the most frigidly cucumberish fashion.

It appeared that on a not very remote evening she was being driven across Piccadilly Circus towards the Strand, when a block in the traffic caused the carriage to pull up almost directly in front of the Criterion Bar. At first Féo scarcely noticed the stoppage, the pleasant tide of her thoughts running on the recent, self-instituted moral reformation of Mr Contango, he having begun, according to his own account, to make "great gobs of the wherewith" by following financial journalism in the City. Than this nothing in the world could be likelier, since he really has a most persuasive literary style and, indeed, once wrote a letter of condolence to the widow of a bookmaker (killed in a sort of paper-chase by a blow from a bottle) which was so convincing that no sooner had the anguished relict read it than she put off her mourning, took a couple of phenacetin tabloids, and went out to a music-hall. Mr Contango's further assurances that he had absolutely renounced the use of hot and rebellious liquors, Féo more readily believed, she told me, since she had only that very morning poured him out seven tumblers of cold water before rising. As the period of her detention in the middle of the Circus by the rozzer in the rubber overalls became unreasonably prolonged, however, she lowered the carriage window and—

did so just in time to behold a most sickening spectacle. The glazed doors of the American Bar were suddenly thrown open by an unseen force, and Mr Contango was projected violently into the road! So vigorous was the propelling power behind him, said Féo, that he cleared the pavement as if he had been dynamited horizontally, and he would have bitten the dust but that his nose seemed to be in the way. As he arose with bleeding proboscis and hurled at his projector a string of sunset adjectives, which it was quite impossible for her to hear in the presence of servants, Féo saw clearly that Mr Contango had vineleaves in his hair, so, sinking back upon the cushions of the carriage, she was borne to her destination in the collapsed condition so graphically described by Dr Harris Ruddock as "the engine with the fly-wheel gone."

Not until the following afternoon did Mr Contango return to Eaton Square, when (although Féo has since ascertained that he ate a soothing, if vulgar, supper of tripe and onions in a kitchen in Pimlico) the explanation he gave of his damaged family feature was that he had been trying a bicycle in the street and got a flat wheel —fortunately just outside the hospital into which the bystanders carried him. With unusual wisdom Féo expressed no comment, but instituted the inquiries to which the torn blue envelope had

brought the sequel. Crystallised, it was as follows :

There is, so say Féo's sleuth-hounds, no art known to moderns (save that of the subdolous Somerset Street *passé* face-fakirs who remove crow's feet, beetling eyebrows, and double chins, and restore and preserve youthfulness in ten successive ninety-minute "treatments" at one-guinea-and-a-half per) which is netting more money for its artificers than the art of "telling the tale," and in a branch of this industry which he has made peculiarly his own, has Mr Contango been reaping the golden results erroneously attributed by Féo to honest literary labour. In the buffet-bars, the music-halls, and "other places where they sing" in the wide world of cheap flutter, Mr Contango (in whose family, Féo now remembers having been told by a palmist, poverty has predominated over honesty from pre-historic times) has been in the habit of encountering the young gentlemen best adapted to his purpose. Féo's inquiry-agents describe these individuals as "the juvenile jays of convivial commercialdom," but I prefer to preserve an impartial lukewarmth in the matter. In their proper sphere they are, I feel convinced, quite genuine persons though of the unfortunate kind that cannot get away in the afternoon, and are therefore the more likely to be entrapped when dolled up and out for the evening. It is a lamentable but incontrovertible

solecism, I am told, that many young men who are highly moral — almost German-Reed — at heart, are inwardly never happier than when suspected of disreputable tendencies.

Entering any bar or public place where one of these odd creatures, attired in an evening suit of eccentric cut and showing a scarlet silk handkerchief protruding from the waistcoat, chances to be lounging, deeply cogitating whether the obviously interested onlookers take him for the latest turf plunger or the French Embassy, Mr Contango immediately gives an elaborate exhibition of surprise and delight.

"Why, my dear old lad!" cries he, rushing up and taking the poseur by both fists, "this is indeed red and yellow wine for me! To think that I haven't set eyes on you since Lincoln, and last week was the Two Thousand! And *you*, above all others, who never by any chance missed a Newmarket? Too bad, too bad; we were a melancholy crowd without you; no little mênus, no cards; to bed with the chickens, and the Rooms at midnight as soundless as a Libyan desert! Now what prevented you: something fresh in petticoats, I'll wager?"

Flattered and confused by all this, the simpleton hesitates. His sense of rectitude prompts some such reply as "You have the advantage of me," or, alternatively, "I think

you are mistaken"—(see Mixitt's "Art of Polite Conversation." One Shilling. At all bookstalls) — but his vanity forbids it. To be mistaken for anybody rather than plain Tom Cobley is, in fact, the very keynote to the assumption of the funny evening kit, the ludicrous red hanky; that the conversation happens to be so much above his head is very regrettable, but still no fault of his—indeed he has not as yet uttered one single word. And if, after all, he sufficiently resembles this racing celebrity, this young blood so gifted and accomplished that his mere absence from a "First Spring" causes the whole of Newmarket to be plunged in melancholy, why should *he*, plain Tom Cobley, be under the obligation of making, in front of a score of strangers—for an audience soon gathers—the humiliating admission that, far from being "dear old lad," he is not a turfite at all but a—well, private individual from the hindquarters of Oxford Street? So, seeing no great harm in winging a little, he replies, with absolute truth:

"No, it was nothing in petticoats"—(quite probably he is in the "Ribbon and Lace," and not the "Underclothing" at all)—"but something quite different that detained me. But I must be going now."

"Lucky dog! lucky dog!" then cries Mr Contango. "For ever hammering on the anvil

of passion, and drinking only, as did your illustrious forebears, out of the satin shoes of their mistresses. But—er—I really *must* have *one* word with you before you go: you can guess what about, eh?"

"Indeed, I can't."

"Aye, there comes your patrician breeding again, lad! A noble nature, inherited from a long line of exalted sires, confers on you the privilege of forgetting your benefices to your friends! Mean to say you have forgotten the fiver which you generously pressed upon me as we came off the course at Lincoln?"

"Absolutely," replies the youth, utterly out of his depth, but discerning no danger.

"Then let me try and recall the circumstances to your mind. I had had a dash on Merry Andrew for the last race—with what result you know: Ariosto chopped him at the start and was never headed. I was absolutely stranded for ready cash—positively without my railway fare on to Liverpool—when you—may heav'n bless you for your generous act—leapt into the breach. I have fortunately a blank cheque here——"

At this he would draw from a quilted-satin note case a green cheque form, and continue: "—and, for once, I may discharge my debt, though never my obligation. Meantime, old college-companion, pray condescend to take one parting drink with me—nay, be pleased to let *me*

pay : 't may seem like Lazarus entertaining Dives, but no matter. Barkeeper, two special liqueurs of the Imperial O.V.H., a large 'polly divided, and—the pen and the inkhorn, quick!"

By now, Cobley's entanglement is greater than his brain can compass. He has allowed his ineptitude to sink him to the level of a common swindler ; yet the hard-shelled fact that the position is none of his seeking is being shouted through an unseen megaphone into his ear by an invisible Adversary of Souls. Were it not for the accursed, gaping mob, he would chance making a clean breast of it ; but the truth will not bear all lights. At worst he must accept the draft and contrive to return it privately, later on.

"Here we are, dear lad," cries Mr Contango, finishing the writing (and poor Cobley's reflections) and flourishing the cheque, "I have made it for a tenner because I find that I have just run out of silver, but if you will let me have a couple or three sovereigns just to carry me home, you can send your man round to Coutts's in the morning and slip me the remainder to-morrow night, or to-morrow twelvemonth, or — well, whenever I ask you for it. Aha! I'm about as fond of asking a fellow for money as you are, dear boy!"

It is then that Mr Cobley falls slap into the net and sinks just as deeply as he has cash

available—for I presume that even *you*, dear, are not so innocent in this "sordid and merciless age of industrialism" as to suppose that the cheque is of any more service to anybody than a stomach-ache. It is a very real lesson in the art of banking that Mr Cobley receives as the bank cashier returns him the stumer with the additional inscription of "N.E."—"No Earthly" upon it. He sees at a glance precisely how much smaller his expenditure for the year will be since his little envelope for the month of May has been put through the wringer. And what if he subsequently lies in wait for Mr Contango with a view to readjustments, I think I hear you ask? Why, frankly, that would afford him about as much real joy as secretly pinching the cork leg of a lady stranger in a crowded omnibus. Mr Contango would instantly fetch him a crack across the mazzard with a bar towel, or some similarly offensive weapon, and accuse him aloud of every sin both in and out of the decalogue, not omitting the mysterious and only unforgivable one which is barely outlined in the Book of Revelations; he would, in short, do every objectionable thing within human knowledge—short of personally summoning the police. Estimating (Féo's scouts conclude) the number of convivial commercialists put through the hoop at three per night, and averaging the sum contributed by each at fifty-seven-and-sixpence, Mr Contango has

been drawing an income of close upon three thousand a year from a source previously exploited only by cheap tobacconists and abandoned barmaids!

Is not it appalling? But perhaps you do not know that the first stone of the quite considerable pile left by the late Mr Sam Lewis was laid by youthful ignorance of banking methods—not Samuel's ignorance, dear; *he* knew all about banks, from his youth up, and quite frequently he took one. He was originally, you must know, a travelling jeweller, though upon a certain Monday morning when, instead of continuing to travel, he sent word to his firm that his liver was not acting—for all the world as though he expected that indispensable organ to go on at the Gaiety in tights and trunks, and a flaxen wig!—also that he was detained by an urgent matter of a lucrative character, likewise he was bidden to the funeral ceremonies of a very dear friend, not to mention his doctor's imperative orders about staying in the house with so serious a suppressed cold; many a conjecturing ear took a more forward inclination in the vain hope of learning something a little more definite. In reality, Samuel was occupied in raising twenty thousand spangles for a young gentleman who, after interviewing his pass-book, had come to the sickening conclusion that he had overdrawn his banking account to about that tune. The poor

boy had, in a lucid interval between drinks, sent for the little parchment wallet and compared its totals in order to see how much more money, if any, he had got to spend before he died, and from even the most careless analysis of the figures there existed between the right-hand columns and the left-hand columns a discrepancy of £19,776, 11s. 7d. The very natural conclusion to which these figures, as well as a colossal ache in the back of his head (By Christmas! how it did throb, throb, throb!) resigned him, was that he *must* have had an even better time than it had seemed—a distinct chunk of consolation in a way, but one that dug no subway for the man who had got to find "a hundred" somehow for a real little topweight, quite the very best that the dear old "Guv'nor" had ever put on any stage.

It was, however, when dear old Sam (as those who paid up as well as those who only renewed, alike addressed him) called in with the cash and spread the bonnie crisp notes of the Bank of England all over the blessed table that the sun took on new brightness. For a single glance at the inside of the pass-book disclosed to the genial Hebrew the fact that, far from being overdrawn, the high-mettled lad, whose magnificent ignorance of ledger-accounts only increased his nobility, simply didn't know which side of the book was the other, and actually

had at that moment £19,776, 11s. 7d. standing to his credit.

"Anyhow," he remarked apologetically, after telling his man to fly down to the bank and get four more cheque-books immediately, "there must be thunder in the air, or something, for I'll take my oath I had less to drink last night than I did all the rest of last week put together."

Fancy you, dear kid, not knowing that, unlike the big drapery houses of London, which think nothing of lending an overstrung divinity of the footlights who may be expecting a bed-and-breakfast visit from an old Girton chum, a silk nightie; of sending it home to the *recherché* little flat at the top of the two-hundred-and-sixty-two stone steps, and of taking it back next morning after all the creases and crow's feet, bar its warehouse ones, have been pressed out by the great weight of some large literary work—Bunyan is about the heaviest in our language—and its pink ribbons have made their first rapid pass under a warm flat iron; the proprietors of les Grands Magasins do not cordially endorse the system of sending out their stock "on appro." Ample facilities for "appro rapide" are afforded on the premises to princesses of the blood and other noble damsels, who do not object to discrown themselves and slip into some lawn or batiste article of the *intime* toilette at 9 f. 50

in the shadow of a festoon of organdi muslins, or a bunch of shop-soiled ostrich stoles, but the girl who cannot make up her unsettled mind until she has got into the things in her own bedroom and, with her biggest picture hat on and a chrysanthemum in her hair, has marched up and down in front of her cheval glass singing "Won't you come home *now*, Bill Bailey?" is invariably discouraged. The hierophants of the Louvre, who in their pudacity request even married men who are not accompanied by their own wives to be good enough to conceal their identity as far as possible, claim that the "appro Anglais" system demoralises both the goods and the customers, but especially the goods.

And, somehow, this vagrant mention of married men and their wives reminds me to tell you that the impossible Invernairnes have quite recently made it up and sworn eternal friendship again. It came about all unrehearsed and unexpectedly—at least so she told some two or three hundred women at her club, in strict confidence and on the distinct understanding that it went no further. They have lately been vegetating—in separate beds—in a sweetly rural spot called Hampstead, where the liver-pad and the footpad derive mutual benefit on Bank Holidays, and where all that one need do when one is hungry is to pull up a carrot and milk the cow. From a luxurious sleeping-

saloon on the first floor, Lady Invernairne could gaze across miles and miles of the western heath; though the eastern view from the palleted box-room on a higher floor, where his lordship lay like a case of suspended animation, was less imposing, and, indeed, consisted principally of whitewashed walls punctuated by a green door with a small ace-of-diamonds window and a latch string in it.

One night a brilliant thunderstorm swept o'er the Heath, the thunder rolling noisily down the very roofs of rainwashed slate, the heavens parting to take flashlight pictures of the fertile valleys of North Middlesex. A forked blue flame played in the sky above the crematorium at Golder's Hill, a ball of living fire dropped into the lake at Hendon, and—the craven Lady Invernairne crept from her bed to stand by her window and shake with terror, her eyes half closed and her firm, fair bosom—in adaged phrase they used to "lay the table" on her—turned temporarily to gooseflesh. It is at such times, when Nature scolds, that woman needs someone to comfort her and hold her hand till daylight happens or the storm abates. Never dreaming of consequences, Lady Invernairne weakly called down from the box-room the case of "suspended animation," and manlike, he presumed——

But Féo, still a bunch of nerves, has just burst in to say that if a fiver is sufficient recom-

pense for two hours in the Turkish and three plain dishes for dinner, I can be on.

It is.

Toujours a toi,

VIOLA.

THE END

"PITCHER'S" BOOKS

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

"These volumes, the maddest, merriest books, full of irresponsible fun and frivolity."

GAL'S GOSSIP

". . . 'Gal's Gossip' is a shocking good book."—*London Referee.*

"Bright, sparkling, and racy."—*Sun.*

Large Crown 8vo. Price 3s. 6d.

SANDS & CO

EDINBURGH: 13 BANK STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

MORE GAL'S GOSSIP

BY A. M. BINSTEAD

("PITCHER")

"... Laughter holding both its sides pervades the book."—*Sporting Times.*

"Mr Binstead ... possesses the happy gift of being able to convey his humour to his readers."—*The Pelican.*

Large Crown 8vo. Cloth. With Artistic Cover
Price 3s. 6d.

SANDS & CO.

EDINBURGH: 13 BANK STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.

HOUNDSDITCH DAY BY DAY

Large Crown 8vo. Cloth Extra
Price 3s. 6d.

PITCHER IN PARADISE

Some Random Reminiscences Sporting and Otherwise

Price 6s.

SANDS & CO.

EDINBURGH: 13 BANK STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND W.C.

A PINK 'UN AND A PELICAN

BY

A. M. BINSTEAD ("Pitcher") and ERNEST WELLS ("Swears")

Price 3s. 6d.

Also a Cheaper Edition in Paper Covers, price 6d.

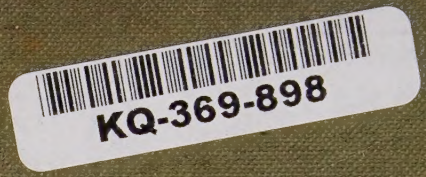
". . . We take leave of the book with genuine regret . . ."—*Daily Telegraph.*

"This is one of the raciest books you are likely to strike."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

SANDS & CO.

EDINBURGH: 13 BANK STREET

LONDON: 23 BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.


KQ-369-898